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ESSAYS

ON

FREETHINKING AND PLAINSPEAKING.

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BY

LESLIE STEPHEN.

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DEDICATION.

My dear Norton,

I venture to dedicate this book to you in memory of a friendly intercourse never, I trust, to be forgotten by me; and in gratitude for its fruitfulness in that best kind of instruction which is imparted unconsciously to the giver.

Your affectionate friend,

LESLIE STEPHEN.

To C. E. Norton, Esq.

Cambridge, Mass.

NOTICE.

THE first eight chapters of this volume are reproductions, with more or less modification, of articles which have appeared in *Fraser's Magazine* and the *Fortnightly Review*. The last chapter has not been hitherto published.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	The Broad Church	1
II.	Religion as a Fine Art	41
III.	Darwinism and Divinity	72
IV.	Are We Christians?	110
V.	A Bad Five Minutes in the Alps . .	155
VI.	Shaftesbury's 'Characteristics' . . .	198
VII.	Mandeville's 'Fable of the Bees.' . .	243
VIII.	Warburton	279
IX.	An Apology for Plainspeaking . . .	326

FREETHINKING AND PLAINSPEAKING.

CHAPTER I.

THE BROAD CHURCH.

NOT long ago, a letter was published in the newspapers from a distinguished resident at Cambridge. In it he assigned certain reasons which induced him to give up his position as a clergyman, so far as the state of the law enabled him to do so. He had to declare, he said, at his ordination as a deacon, that he 'unfeignedly believed in the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testament;' but he could not now make that declaration, 'taking the words in their natural sense.' Other expressions in the Prayer-book evidently assume the untenable doctrine of the infallibility of the Bible, whereas some portions of the Scriptures seemed to him to contain errors in fact, and questionable teaching in morality. Further, there were certain expressions in the Liturgy which he could no longer use. He could not stand beside the altar and say 'God spake these words' when he was convinced that God did not speak

them. Holding these views, he could not, as an honourable man, continue to occupy a position which necessarily involved a certain amount of insincerity; and it would be impertinent to pay him any compliments on obeying the dictates of his conscience.

In this every one will, of course, agree. Any one who believed, whether rightly or mistakenly, that he could not at the same time officiate as a clergyman and speak the truth, would be bound to officiate no longer; or, if we may not assume so much, we may at least say that a man who refuses to officiate from a regard to truth is guilty of nothing worse than a pardonable error or an amiable weakness. There is, however, a further question, which may be fairly discussed. The Broad Church party have a very natural dislike to the course of conduct adopted by this gentleman. They hold opinions strongly resembling his, or, it may be, in some respects identical; but they do not see—what he saw so forcibly—the incompatibility between holding those opinions and retaining the position of a clergyman. His action, therefore, forms an awkward precedent, and tends to abridge the liberty which they at present enjoy. It has been decided, they urge, by the highest legal authorities, that a man may continue to act as a clergyman who does not believe in the infallibility of the Scriptures; who holds that they may contain erroneous statements both of facts and of morality; and who by no means believes that the account given in the Pentateuch of the promulgation

of the Ten Commandments is to be taken as a literal historical truth. Mr. Wilson, for example, asserted in plain terms in one of the *Essays and Reviews* that there was a 'dark crust of human error and passion over many parts of the Bible;' yet the prosecution directed against him, and supported by all the eloquence and learning of skilled advocates, left him in possession of his living, and therefore determined, as far as a legal decision could determine, that a clergyman is not bound, whatever may be the 'natural sense of the words,' to hold the obnoxious doctrine. It is only to be expected that a different mode of action should be unpalatable to gentlemen who value and make constant use of the privilege thus secured. It amounts, in their opinion, to an admission that vague popular interpretations are to be allowed to supersede legal decisions; and that a man may be expelled—not because he is convicted of disputing the formularies of the Church in the sense affixed to them by the legitimate authorities; but because he disputes the sense affixed to them by ignorant party prejudice. Men who value the Church of England above all things for the wide comprehension which results in their opinion from its connection with the State, and its subordination to secular tribunals, may well be jealous of any concession, even in appearance, to popular clamour.

This argument raises a question of the highest importance to the future of the Church of England; and of some interest even to persons outside the sacred

pale. The theory of the Broad Church party is that the legal restrictions upon the clergy are the measure of the moral restrictions. The law, and the law alone, decides upon the tests which ought to be imposed; and the law must determine the sense in which they are to be taken. It is decided, for example, that the profession of unfeigned belief in the canonical Scriptures does not mean to assert an unfeigned belief of the absolute truth and accuracy of every statement in the Bible. A man who makes that profession only avows what the law says that he avows; and whatever sense the words may convey to an uncultivated understanding, he is not guilty of the slightest insincerity in using them in the sense put upon them by their authorised interpreters. If an assertion that God is God and Mahomet is his prophet should be declared by those who imposed it to mean a belief in Christianity, it might doubtless be taken in that sense by a scrupulously honest man. Hence it clearly follows that no one has a right to accuse a clergyman of insincerity so long as he takes the test in the legal sense. I may be privately of opinion that certain dignitaries not only hold doctrines which are logically incompatible with some assertions in the Articles; but that they use words in a very odd fashion. But I am not thereby authorised to impute to them the very slightest degree of dishonesty, equivocation, or mental reservation. And, as a matter of fact, no reasonably candid person doubts that many members of the very wide

party generally described as the Broad Church, are as honourable in every sense of the word as men can be. There is, however, a further question which must be left to every man's own conscience. It does not follow that because the law allows a certain liberty, it is right or wise to take advantage of it. The law may say that by professing a belief in the canonical Scriptures, I only imply a modified belief in an uncertain part of them. But a man may feel that by using such words he is conveying a false impression to his hearers, and is propagating a doctrine from which he inwardly revolts. When he reads the Psalms or the Commandments in church, he is perhaps taken in law to assert nothing more than a general respect for their authors, such as he might feel for Dante or Socrates; if, however, his action helps to strengthen ninety-nine people out of a hundred in the belief, which he does not share, that they possess a supernatural and infallible authority, he might properly refuse to take part in the ceremony. Admitting that he has some duty to those whose privileges will be endangered by his resignation, he has also a primary and, it may be, a conflicting duty of not taking part in the spread of error and superstition. In short, it is one thing to take a test, and another to assume all the responsibilities involved in the position of a clergyman. We have no right of any sort to blame anybody who is not breaking the law; but we may fairly discuss the policy of using the freedom it confers.

I mention this, merely to evade the inference that, in what follows, I mean to cast the slightest blame upon any one for taking what may be a mistaken, but certainly not a dishonest, view of his position and responsibilities. And, assuming that there is no question as to the action of any individuals, I may venture to speak of a problem which often perplexes outsiders. Men who believe that many of the popular views of Christianity are erroneous and immoral, but who believe nevertheless that Christianity in some sense will be the ultimate religion of the world, are in a very difficult position. Should they use the old formulæ and trust that they will gradually purify themselves from that 'crust of human error,' or should they break with the old state of things and try a fresh start? Is it a time for adaptation or for entire reconstruction? Will they have the best standing-ground by demanding reform from within or from without? Is there vitality enough in the existing organisation to give promise of renewed vigour when it is freed from the dead excrescences which hamper and impede its growth; or must they decide that the constraints which it imposes more than counterbalance the advantages which it offers? There is always fair ground for hesitation at such a period as the present. It is difficult to decide the precise point of time at which wise conservatism passes into obstructiveness. Many of the best men amongst us will have the tenderest attachment to the old beliefs and be most reluctant to give up even the

old phraseology. Whatever claims are still possessed by the Church of England to the allegiance of thinking men are due to the Broad Church element amongst the clergy. In evangelicism the old Puritanic element has become thin and sour; whilst Ritualism is surely the most vapid form of sacerdotalism ever imposed upon effeminate natures. Adherents of both phases of opinion may have great merits in point of practical zeal. But were it not that a party of equal sincerity and greater breadth of view still remains within the Church, it would be hard for any male person of liberal views to have anything to do with it. Such a man would stand aside and let the dead bury their dead. He would be curious to know how long a creed could retain its vitality after the brains had been taken out, but would take little interest in the precise details of the decay which must inevitably ensue.

There is, however, a much higher interest involved than that of any Church whatever. The Church of England may hold together or it may gradually die of inanition or split into hostile fragments. The world would survive even if Anglicanism were a thing of the past, and would probably find itself much better off than clergymen expect. Whatever happens, the religious instincts of mankind will survive and will find some mode of expression. Whether they take such a form as is expected by the followers of Comte, or return to the ancient modes of thought, they have a vitality independent of any existing organisation. We

are, however, passing through a great change, of which no living man can expect to witness the end or even the beginning of the end. How is it to be brought about with the least shock to morality and lofty sentiment; and how are the ideas already familiar to educated people to be propagated through less cultivated classes with the least possible injury to the vital parts of their faith? Innumerable cases of conscience constantly arise from this condition of opinion, the solution of which is not always evident. Am I to say, for example, openly, that the history of the promulgation of the Jewish Law is nothing but a popular legend, when ignorant persons will suppose that I mean to strike at the very foundation of morals? The proposition that God did not give the Ten Commandments to Moses in the thunders of Mount Sinai will be understood to mean that there is no divine sanction condemning murder, false witness, and adultery. Is not silence in such a case better than a rash proclamation of a bare truth, which without the necessary corollaries and qualifications may be practically equivalent to a falsehood? Difficulties more or less resembling this are very frequent, and it would be useless to deny that they are real difficulties. But I imagine that one conclusion is plain enough in theory, though not always carried out in practice. Whatever reticence may be desirable, we ought not to tell lies, or to countenance the telling lies. The greatest danger to which we are exposed at the present moment is

not that people find the old faiths failing them, but that they begin to doubt that there is anywhere such a thing to be found as faith in anything. A father naturally shrinks from telling his children that the biblical stories which they hear at school or from their mother are not undoubted truths. A clever child probably strikes out some little fragment of scepticism; he doubts whether all the animals in the Zoological Gardens could have been got into the ark; or whether Samson could have found the jaw-bone of an ass so effective a weapon as is represented in the Bible. His parent probably tells him that good little boys believe all that their masters say. Presently the boy grows towards manhood and learns without much trouble that Samson's jawbone and Noah's ark are reckoned amongst childish fables by his own father and by all sensible men. The discovery gives a much greater shock to his faith than he would have received from an originally frank explanation, and had he always believed that the adventures of Samson were as little to be relied upon and had as little to do with rational religion as the adventures of Hercules. He begins to discover, or to think he discovers, that religions are preached, not because they are true, but because they are a highly convenient substitute for police regulations. There may be no such place as hell, but we can't afford to let the criminal classes into the secret. We all make-believe as hard as we possibly can; we go to church with the most praiseworthy punctuality;

we shake our heads at the preacher's lamentations over the progress of rationalism; and some of us go home to lunch and treat the whole history as Socrates treated the polytheism of his time. It was highly useful, but not worth arguing seriously with intelligent people. No one who has any knowledge of the kind of language held by intelligent men when not arrayed in surplices or cassocks, will doubt that such sentiments are exceedingly common. It is only a few who have the iconoclastic temperament and desire to break down the convenient old creeds, because they may be rotten at the core; but a large minority, or possibly a large majority, believe that they are rotten, and that by a sudden crash or a slower process of decay, they will disappear or undergo some profound transformation. Such a state of mind, it may be said, is by no means a novelty. But if by no means a novelty, it possesses a new significance. The argument of Christian apologists has undergone a singular change. The old advocates of orthodox opinions said, in substance, Believe this because it is true. The sum and substance of most modern advocacy is, Believe this, true or not true, because its falsehood cannot be mathematically demonstrated. It is hard indeed to find what is the ultimate foundation upon which most modern controversialists would rest their arguments in the last resort. They play so many tricks with faith and reason that we are puzzled to say in what name they speak. The whole tendency of

a large and zealous school is to deny the competence of reason, which when put into plain English and stripped of all the ingenious logical devices by which we may be perplexed and thrown off the scent, amounts pretty much to denying that the question whether a doctrine is or is not true, is a relevant argument in deciding whether we are to believe it. Be a Roman Catholic or you are certain to become an atheist, is simply an argument for atheism. It means that all fair methods of argument applicable in other cases will lead you to atheism. The ingenious inference, which by an odd inversion of meaning claims to be peculiarly logical, is that as two and two will make four if you persist in adding them, you should refrain from adding them. 'Do you not see,' said one controversialist to another, 'that the inevitable inference from your opinions is so and so?' 'Probably,' was the reply, 'but I do not draw it.' This method of reasoning, which consists in frightening a man out of all reasoning by exhibiting its logical conclusion, may answer for a time with some people, but its final result must be ruinous. It means that our religious faiths are to be cut off from all solid groundwork of fact and be cultivated as a poetical sentiment or a taste for the fine arts without any reference to reality. The application of the principle to history naturally follows. The apologists do not attempt to prove that the events recorded in the Bible really happened, or possess such evidence as would convince a reasonable man; but confine themselves to

showing that it is not proved that they did not happen. We can believe them without encountering any invincible shock to our credulity, if we try very hard to believe them; and that is quite enough for our imaginations, if we are not wicked enough to be troublesome with our critical faculties. Religion, in short, is so beautiful a thing; it gives such fine scope for our best emotions; it affords such healthy exercise for the soul, that we ought to believe all the dogmas upon which it is founded without looking closely upon the evidence.

When language approaching to this, though neither so frank nor extravagant, is openly talked, it is in fact a concession to the covert scepticism of which I have spoken. Christianity, says the freethinker, is very good for women and children and clergymen; but it is not worth the serious discussion of educated men. Putting this sentiment into a decent theological dress, it is the equivalent of the theological assertion, that religion is a matter of faith and not of reason. The two parties may be perfectly harmonious; and a kind of tacit compact may be arranged in virtue of which we may talk as we please in private, but allow the clergy to have their say in public, and affect to shrug our shoulders at Voltaire and his more scientific successors.

Such an arrangement is common enough. I need not here argue that it is essentially immoral and must ultimately be ruinous to the creed which accepts so treacherous a support. The Broad Church, however, distinguish themselves by repudiating any such com-

promise in theory. They tell us with a frankness which does them honour, that the Bible records must be tested by every method which the ingenuity of critics has discovered, and that they do not ask us to accept it unless it will stand an examination as searching as we should demand in the case of profane history: or, as Mr. Jowett forcibly put it, that the Bible must be criticised 'like any other book.' They assert further that Christianity must be divine because its moral teaching is incomparably purer than any other creed, and includes and reconciles all the half-thoughts of merely human creatures; they admit that if these propositions could not be established, if it could be proved that the Christian morality were imperfect or positively erroneous, we should be bound to reject it. They confess that the ultimate test of religious truth must lie in its conformity to our moral sense and the historical accuracy of the assertions upon which it is founded. They therefore ask for our belief on straightforward grounds and do not seek to perplex the question by irrelevant appeals to considerations which could have no weight in the court of pure reason. Every fair reasoner is therefore bound to respect them even if (as is the case with me) he is compelled to reject their conclusions. If they are not allies they are satisfactory antagonists. They have a common ground with all who are anxious to discover the truth at all hazards, and are anxious for *nothing* else. So long as they act up to their principles they can do nothing but

good. A man who is led to the right conclusions by the right methods is doubtless the most useful; but next to him is the man whose conclusions are wrong, though his methods are right. If every man would speak candidly and we could all agree upon the canons by which our opinions are to be judged, we should reach a fair unanimity with surprising rapidity. I imagine that educated men are much nearer agreement than is generally supposed; though unluckily we have got into such habits of conscious or unconscious deception of ourselves and others that it is difficult to disinter a man's genuine faith from the masses of conventional language and insincere dogma under which it is habitually covered. The great merit of Broad Churchmen is that they try to meet argument fairly, and admit in theory the importance of searching, fair, and unfettered inquiry. If they admitted it in practice as well as in theory, there would be no more to be said.

Is there then anything about them which may lead us to believe not that they are consciously insincere but that they do not in practice allow free play to the convictions thus stated?

To this it must be answered that there is one cause of bewilderment to everybody who has studied the writings of the school. We have to believe in a miracle as singular as that by which the British Constitution has been, at every stage in its development, the pride and envy of the world. Our thrice-blessed system is as we all know the product of a

series of compromises, accidents, and bit by bit reforms, carried out on no definite principle but by a sort of indefinite rule of thumb; and yet the result of all this patching and piecing, this hammering and tinkering, has always been a kind of embodiment of perfect wisdom. It would have antecedently seemed almost as likely as that a house which had been inhabited by a series of tenants, each of whom had thrown out a window or added a closet wherever it seemed good to him, should exhibit the perfect symmetry and adaptation to its purposes of the Parthenon. One consequence of such theories is at any rate rather shocking to people who believe that truthfulness and simplicity have their value even in the sphere of politics, and share Mr. Carlyle's contempt for shams. A large part of the constitutional machinery has been preserved, although it has become useless for any intelligible purposes. We are assured, however, by adepts in political mysteries, that a good constitution ought to consist of two parts—a showy outside to impose upon the vulgar, and some really efficient machinery to carry on business. It should resemble some of the buildings erected at the lowest ebb of architecture, where all the structural parts were carefully concealed behind a vast screen intended to look magnificent. That such a system is inevitable at times and may be endured in preference to a revolution is an intelligible creed; but it does seem strange that any one should openly hold it up as the quint-

essence of legislative wisdom. There are some symptoms that this device is beginning to lose its prestige; and rash people dare hint that a government need, not command less respect because it is all intended primarily for work as well as for show.

Few people, however, have learnt this lesson in the analogous case. Our creed still contains a vast number of obsolete dogmas which are kept for show instead of for use. If any rash person dares to denounce them, a cry is raised in all quarters against his sacrilegious presumption. The tares and the wheat, or, to speak more plainly, the truths and the humbugs, are so intricately mixed that we dare not touch one lest the other should suffer. It is an ingenious plan and may answer for a time; but it has its dangers. There may come a time when inquiry will be too late and the whole constitution be injured because we have obstinately averted our eyes from the unpleasant symptoms of decay. The Thirty-nine Articles are the product of a series of compromises of thought and legislation as strange as those to which the British constitution is owing; and yet, like our secular legislation, they are confidently asserted to contain the highest expression of wisdom that the human brain can comprehend. They are an expression of the views about theology current in this part of the British islands in the sixteenth century; they embody all sorts of dogmas which have floated down from distant ages, the sense of many of them entirely evaporating on the road;

they represent the best available compromise which could be struck out under the circumstances of the time; and it need not be said that the whole current of modern thought has ebbed away from many of the questions discussed and left nothing but the bare husks of extinct opinions which for ordinary Englishmen have next to no significance. Next comes a gentleman of great candour and abilities, thoroughly versed in all modern philosophy, who professes to have started from first principles, to have worked out his conclusions without fear or favour; to have followed the united teaching of reason and revelation wherever it led him; and behold! he discovers that these Articles exactly express his very deepest convictions in the most unequivocal language. When such a phenomenon occurs, as it sometimes does, I must confess it gives me a very unpleasant sensation. One of two conclusions is inevitable. Either there is a coincidence which may almost be called miraculous; if Lord Bacon or the wisest man of his time, whoever he was, had drawn up a scheme of politics, we should now have pronounced it defective and erroneous, and altogether beside the modern modes of thought; theology has undergone a change not less profound and extensive; yet this formula, drawn up by men ignorant of our modern doubts and convictions, turns out to be so flexible or to have such vitality that it exactly expresses the ripest conclusions of an eminent modern thinker,—a result which is to me as singular as if the strategics of

days before gunpowder were precisely suitable for the era of ironclads and Henry rifles. Or else—and I confess this is the only conclusion at which I could arrive—the eminent modern thinker, like many other eminent men, has been unconsciously biassed in his reasonings by the desire to reach certain foregone conclusions.

It is this constantly recurring difficulty which is destroying the influence of the Broad Church party. They protest, and I doubt not with perfect sincerity, that they throw aside all considerations except the simple desire of discovering the truth. And yet their investigations always end in opinions which are at least capable of expression in the words of the most antiquated formulæ. It is as if a man should say that he always steered due north and yet his course should invariably take him safely through all the shoals and tortuosities of the Thames and land him conveniently at Lambeth stairs. I should think that there must be something very odd about his compasses. We talk of the dishonesty of the men who sidle up to the Roman Catholic Church in spite of every obstacle raised by rubrics and Privy Council decisions. The true difference between them and the Broad Church seems to be that one set of thinkers base their whole system on some single but gigantic fiction, whilst the others prefer to mix truth and fiction in each article separately. Of conscious dishonesty, which means lying to others, there is probably little enough in either

case; but towards lying to onesself, which is a bad thing in its way, there is abundant temptation in both cases.

Such reflections torment the students of the writings of the late most amiable and excellent Mr. Maurice. No one could listen to him or come within the range of his personal influence without being profoundly attracted by the beauty of his character. The lads who had the advantage of hearing his teaching before the authorities of King's College discovered that he did not believe that hell was as hot and as durable as could be wished, generally went through a curious intellectual stage in after life. Some, indeed, have never emerged from it. To others it represents a mere transitory phase of thought upon which they look back with a half-pathetic and half-humorous interest. They remember how eagerly they followed this teacher, whose moving tones, tremulous with suppressed earnestness, seemed to promise a new revelation. Could they but learn the secret which he appeared to have discovered, they would be able to reconcile faith and science, to extract the true ennobling essence from all the creeds, to make scientific formulæ glow with divine light, and to find refreshment for their souls in barren theological dogmas. They racked their brains over the written words of the teacher, and turned for help to his ever eloquent and impassioned speech. And yet, labour as they would, the secret always seemed to evade them. The master could force all theories into his service with

surpassing ingenuity which they were loath to recognise as of the merely verbal order; and yet when they tried to repeat the performance for themselves, the rigid formulæ refused to blend and dissolve and reunite, as in the hands of the true magician. It was easy, indeed, to learn a few catchwords, which, if you did not look into them too closely, seemed to solve every doubt. But grasp a definite proposition; pin it down by rigid logical tests; and it either resolved itself into mere empty verbiage, or had an uncomfortable tendency to become inconsistent and self-contradictory. Every statement seemed to be at once negative and affirmative; and you were never sure that, by some strange chemical process, the doctrine from which you started would not be transmuted into what you had supposed to be its direct contradictory. Reluctantly enough you slowly came to the conclusion that you were wandering in cloudland, and beguiled by mere mirages and shifting phantasmagoria, which transformed themselves on a nearer approach. Everlasting damnation of unbelievers was proved to be a most edifying and consolatory doctrine —only that everlasting did not mean everlasting, nor damnation damnation, but yet, somehow or other, that trifling qualification only made a belief in the truth conveyed by the phrase more unspeakably important. Bewildered and provoked, you gave up the effort, content to return to common daylight from this misty region of enchantments; retaining only the moral lesson that candour and toleration were excellent things,

whilst refusing to admit that they implied acceptance of two contradictory theories at the same time.

Mr. Maurice's writings are a melancholy instance of the way in which a fine intellect may run to waste in the fruitless endeavour to force new truth into the old mould. A new chaos, and not a new order is the result of such manipulation of the raw materials of faith. Another section, however, and now the most important section of the Broad Church party, adopts a different theory. They preach it with immense fervour, and seem to think it really edifying.

By good fortune, it is said, the tests were originally so lax and they have since been so much strained and loosened that the articles and other formularies of the Church of England are compatible with the wildest divergence of sentiment. This statement, however, requires a little examination. Every one will of course admit that a man is not bound legally or morally by the popular glosses which have been put upon the Articles. He is not bound to hold, as some people appear to hold, that every word of the authorised version is strictly true. An eminent bishop, for example, was lately reported to have said that, whilst every part of the Bible which concerned our spiritual welfare was strictly true, it was not made out that the same accuracy could be predicated of the historical records of unimportant circumstances. In other words, state ments may possibly be false, whose truth or falsehood is not of the slightest importance to any human being;

we must accept all about the delivery of the Law or the massacre of the Canaanites, and though we may dispute as to the name of Abraham's father, or doubt whether a day in the first chapter of Genesis means a day. So modified a degree of freethinking could shock nobody's faith; and it is not inconsistent with the most impartial interpretation of the Articles. Sceptics of this mild variety have been fitly compared to men who make a great show of bold swimming in shallow water, with one foot firmly planted on the bottom. Between them and more daring venturers in the deep, such as Bishop Colenso or Mr. Voysey, there is a wide interval. Our bishop might naturally feel not merely that he could conscientiously sign the tests but that the formularies of the Church provided the most natural expression for his religious convictions. But I am now speaking of those members of the Broad Church who, feeling that their sentiments fit with a certain awkwardness into the phraseology officially provided for them, substantially argue that they are justified in using strained versions of ordinary language, because the law has sanctioned very wide methods of interpretation. As there are so many shades of opinion, it is impossible to speak in terms applicable to the whole party; nor do I in fact argue that the same course would be appropriate for all. I will therefore take an extreme case which can be discussed without personal imputations on any one. Mr. Voysey exemplified the most advanced stage of opinion at which a man could possibly claim to remain

within the Church. Fortunately, one may be permitted to think, for himself that claim was not allowed. I may still quote from his very powerful defence, and with the less scruple, because, as he himself remarks, his desire to remain within the Church could not possibly be imputed to interested motives. He could, he says, have 'secured a far better worldly position by deserting the Church any time within the last five years.' He put himself most effectually out of the path to promotion; and he wished to stay in order to assert a principle. That principle, so far as it can be called a principle, is merely a bolder assertion of the general Broad Church theory.

Mr. Voysey was accused of heretical teaching in regard to the doctrines of the Atonement, of Justification by Faith, of the Incarnation, and of the Inspiration of the Bible. He admitted, or rather proclaimed, that he disputed the popular interpretation of all those doctrines. But he asserted that his view was within the liberty allowed by law to the clergy. Supposing these statements to be justified, let us see what his position would be. I will take one or two specimens of his general line of argument. The 2nd Article, he says, tells us that 'the Son was crucified, dead and buried, to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for all actual sins of men.' The 31st Article adds that 'the offering of Christ once made is that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction for all the sins of the

whole world, both original and actual: and there is none other satisfaction for sin but that alone.' The assertion contained in these words, says Mr. Voysey, is a mystery. It is an assertion as to a matter upon which the human mind can form absolutely no conception at all. It is as unmeaning as a statement made in an unknown tongue or a cypher. We know it to be true, but we are no more enlightened by it (to take an illustration from Toland, the deist) than if we knew by infallible authority that 'something called a Blictri had a being in nature, and were not told what a Blictri was.' The only way of contradicting this assertion would be the assertion that nothing called a Blictri had a being in nature. Similarly, unless we assert a negative between the predicate and the subject in the proposition put before us, we do not and cannot contradict the Article. Foolish men, however, have chosen to interpret this inconceivable assertion into certain very plain and very erroneous teaching. Mr. Voysey therefore declares, that it is blasphemous and false to say that 'the Father and the Son are to be regarded as two distinct beings driving a bargain, the nature of which bargain is that the Father, in consideration of the pain suffered by the Son, will abstain from torturing after death people whom he otherwise would have tortured.' Further, he utterly denies the absurd theory that Adam was 'morally perfect, whereas he fell into sin at the very first temptation, as most of his posterity do now.' Moreover, it is an odious

mixture of falsehood and absurdity to say that 'when he eat the apple, God the Father cursed the whole human race, and determined that they should all be perpetually tortured in hell-fire after death, and that either before, or at the time, or afterwards, he made a covenant with God the Son, that if God the Son would be crucified (which the contracting parties regarded as being equivalent to being cursed) God the Father would relieve all or some of the human race from the curse which he had set upon them, upon some condition as to their believing something or other of which most of them had never heard.' In the same way, he denies that view of the Incarnation which regards it as Deity coming from heaven and dwelling in an individual man for some years and then going away again; and he would, of course, deal with equal freedom with other mysterious doctrines.

Upon this, and more to the same purpose, there is an obvious observation. The doctrine which Mr. Voysey denounces is, I doubt not, as false and blasphemous as he asserts. But if the fact that a doctrine deals with matters altogether above our apprehension is enough to save it from being blasphemous by depriving it of all intelligible meaning, why are not plain statements denounced by Mr. Voysey just as meaningless as the technical terms of the article? If on the other hand, we can make intelligible propositions about these ineffable mysteries, why is not the Article as revolting as the statements denounced by Mr. Voysey?

How can he save the authors of the Article from the charge of being blasphemous without extending the same favourable construction to its popular interpreters? At any rate, how can Mr. Voysey use language under the excuse that it has no meaning when he asserts that it is so easy to invest it with a meaning, which he declares to be horribly blasphemous? The whole may be meaningless because referring to ineffable mysteries; but that which shocks ordinary minds is precisely the assumption implied in the Article that definite statements can be made about such mysteries.

Mr. Voysey's language about the Bible is perhaps less startling; but it raises a similar difficulty. He quotes from Mr. Fitzjames Stephen's defence of Dr. Rowland Williams a passage summing up the views taken by various eminent divines of the English Church. Tillotson, for example, said that no parts of the Bible need be taken to be inspired which might have been written without inspiration. Burnet and Paley say, that though we must agree with the apostles' conclusions, we need not agree with their premises. Paley said that it is dangerous to make Christianity answerable for the circumstantial accuracy of the Old Testament narratives. Bishop Marsh endorses the opinion of Michaelis that the Gospels of Luke and Mark were not inspired at all. Bishop Hampden says that there is much false moral philosophy in the Bible. Various other authorities are quoted, and it is said that we may put all this together, and consequently

enjoy almost any amount of liberty. It was decided, as we have seen, that Mr. Wilson was justified in saying that there was a dark crust of human error and passion over parts of the Bible; and that Dr. Williams might lawfully deny that Moses wrote the Pentateuch, Peter the Second Epistle of Peter, and Daniel the book of Daniel. Mr. Voysey apparently used the liberty thus conferred, by arguing that St. John did not write the gospel bearing his name, and that parts of it contained immoral doctrine. He had, he says, a legal right to make these assertions, and, holding the views he did, it became his moral duty to make use of that legal right.

I have no wish to dispute Mr. Voysey's conception of his moral duty. I only urge that an equally honest man might take a very different view of his moral duty. The ordinary view of the doctrine of the Atonement is in his opinion inexpressibly repulsive. The language of the Articles and of the Liturgy is generally used to confirm that view. Were it not for the supposed need of maintaining liberal sentiment within the Church, a plain man would naturally use language as remote as possible from that which has been applied to so degrading a purpose; and scrupulously avoid even the appearance of treading in the old tracks. The policy recommended in the name of true liberalism is to use the old language in a different sense or to try to deprive it of all sense whatever. If we wished to dissipate the superstition about witch-

craft, we should naturally say that there were no such things as witches, and that a bargain with the devil was a simple impossibility. According to this plan, we should still talk about witches, but explain that witchcraft was merely a roundabout term for a special variety of disease, and that talk about the devil was necessarily a metaphorical use of language. Which course of conduct would be most likely to put down the superstition, and to convince those who believed in it of the sincerity of its opponents? But for the supposed necessity of leavening the clergy with some liberal spirit, there can be no doubt that men like Mr. Voysey would repudiate the whole doctrine of the Atonement, and be at least as willing to sign the contradictory of the Article as the words to which they now subscribe. How far they benefit the Church may be a matter of discussion, but it seems probable that this covert mode of attack is quite as profitable to their antagonists as to themselves.

Take again the doctrine about the Bible. Mr. Voysey would apparently say that the Gospel of St. John is not authentic; that parts of it are immoral; he would, I should imagine, declare that many parts of the Old Testament contain mere legend or even childish fables; he would say that the massacres of the Canaanites approved by the Hebrew God, were hideous atrocities, which we should describe as they deserved if committed by Mahommedans or Mormons, but to which we have become familiarised by long

association. All this and more than this might perhaps be said without any breach of faith, so far as the tests imposed upon the clergy are concerned. But then would any sensible man holding such opinions get up and read these fables and demoralising stories in church with a solemnity calculated to impress their sacred character upon the minds of his congregation? Much of the Bible is, on this showing, no better than Livy, or Hume's History of England. Would it be an improving practice to read fragments of Hume and Livy in church to people already too much disposed to receive them as infallible guides? One of the superstitions against which we have specially to contend in England is the excessive idolatry of the Bible. Does it confirm or weaken that superstition when the clergyman reads a passage from the Old Testament with the solemn preface, 'God spake these words'? The law may say that these words do not imply what they seem to imply; but the legal interpretation is not present to the minds of the hearers, and has no effect upon them. If the reader afterwards gets up in the pulpit and explains that he has merely been reading some very questionable legends, the hearers are far more likely to be confused than edified. The necessity of going through this mockery, as it must appear to any one holding opinions resembling those of Mr. Voysey, is a far greater strain upon the conscience than the necessity of signing any tests before men who are personally qualified to judge of

their true interpretation. Or with what satisfaction can such a man repeat the creeds as the expression of his devout belief? I say nothing of the poor old damnatory clauses of the Athanasian creed, through which perhaps a sufficient number of loopholes have been made by assiduous labourers of infinite skill in that branch of industry. Indeed one has a certain tenderness for them as relics of a time when men could express their convictions vigorously and think that strong convictions were valuable. But it is hard enough to repeat the clauses which define the doctrine of the Trinity; when one's real meaning is, Here are a number of obscure statements about matters altogether above our understanding, which were thought to have some meaning by believers in an utterly exploded school of philosophy, which now remains like the rudimentary organs in animals as marks of extinct controversies, and which I do not repudiate because they have no particular significance whatever. This is bad enough, without adding that people who won't say as much will be damned. Or, again, it is not pleasant to repeat even the Apostles' creed by way of expressing the opinion that there is, on the whole, sufficient evidence to make me think it more probable than not that Christ was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and rose again on the third day.

Most Broad Churchmen do not of course go so far as this. Some of them, as I have said, declare—and strange as it appears to me, I give them full credit for

believing sincerely—that the formularies of the Church are the natural expression of their deepest convictions. But the opposite line of argument is more common and more intelligible. Mr. Voysey is simply the *enfant terrible* of the Broad Church party. He has cruelly stripped their doctrines of the convenient haze in which they were enveloped; and set down in plain black and white the line of defence which is tacitly assumed in their ordinary justifications. Nothing of course is more unpleasant than to see our own opinions expressed in these harsh, crude, tangible shapes, and made so distinct that they cannot be recognized. The Girondin has a natural antipathy to the Jacobin. Mr. Voysey has committed the grievous fault of excessive frankness. He has shown his cards too plainly. But the doctrines which he assails disappear just as effectually under the milder treatment of the allies by whom he is repudiated. They tend to melt away under their hands. The Atonement is spiritualised till it becomes difficult to attach any definite meaning to it whatever. The authority of the Bible becomes more difficult to define and to distinguish from the authority of any other good book. Everlasting punishment is put out of the way by the aid of judicious metaphysical distinctions. The sharp edges of old-fashioned doctrine are rounded off till the whole outline of the creed is materially altered. Phrases that once seemed perfectly definite turn out to have no meaning, and to become mere surplusage. And the gap between the ordinary interpretation and

that which our new teachers put upon their tests imperceptibly widens, until in some places the directions of the old and new teaching seem to be diametrically opposite. A simple test might be applied in such cases. Let a man put out of his mind, as far as possible, all the old phrases with which he has become familiar, and simply express his thoughts in the clearest language he can find. If this new expression falls in naturally with the old, there is no more to be said. If there is a palpable difficulty in reconciling them, the problem occurs whether he shall use the old in a new sense, or simply abandon language perplexed with so many misleading associations? The answer must be given by deciding which duty is just now the most important: to speak out with the utmost clearness, or to keep the Church of England together a little longer.

I would not blame too seriously those who decide for the last. There is much to be said for the Church of England, and though I am as far as possible from being one of its devoted sons, I can understand the views of men who see in it a great instrument for the education of the nation, in whose cause it is worth making some sacrifice, even of clear expression of a man's convictions. But admitting that men may perhaps be morally justified in taking this view, I deny their right to complain of those who take the opposite view. The one duty which at the present moment seems to me to be of paramount importance, is the duty of perfect intellectual sincerity. We are specially bound not

only to avoid deceiving others, but to avoid deceiving ourselves. The controversies which are now raging remind one of that legendary battle which was fought with so much vehemence that the ghosts of the dead rose and fought side by side with the living. We have to grapple, not merely with living faiths, but with all kinds of phantoms that go about bragging as loudly as if they had a genuine existence. It is like that 'last dim weird battle of the West,' when

> Some had visions out of golden youth,
> And some beheld the faces of old ghosts
> Look in upon the battle,

and when the combatants heard

> Shrieks
> After the Christ of those who, falling down,
> Looked up for heaven and only saw the mist.

For men who wish to fight on both sides; to win enough credit by slaying a dead lie to be justified in dealing tenderly with a living one; to be earnest enough to complain of the devil's dark complexion and yet too candid to call him quite black; that mist is highly convenient. But we require fighting of a sterner kind. Before any satisfactory issue can be reached, we must clear the air of all that cloud of delusion which renders the real questions at issue vague and uncertain. Let us fight in the daylight, and there will be some prospect of winning decisive victories. Now I cannot conceive any doctrine more fatal to genuine veracity of mind than one which exalts into a

duty what seems to me the most dangerous habit of forcing our genuine convictions into the moulds of ancient thought. We are only too much inclined to do so in all cases, and to put off a spirit of enquiry by mere phrases, instead of sincere principles. The process is at once attractive and easy. It is much pleasanter to say that we believe in everlasting punishment, but that everlasting punishment means nothing that can shock the most humane mind, than to denounce the doctrine as untrue and immoral. The habit grows upon us till creeds grow to be mere screens under cover of which we may slink out of the orthodox intrenchments into the opposite camp. Possibly we may do something towards facilitating the admission of timid tendencies towards liberalism; but by using the language of our opponents we lose the one great advantage of appealing boldly and clearly to the sympathies of mankind. Undoubtedly a process such as I have described is in certain cases legitimate; it is as well that human ingenuity cannot construct inflexible cast-iron creeds, and that faiths have been gradually softened, instead of being always directly assaulted. If it had not been for such a process, toleration could never have been introduced, because the contrasts of opinion would have been too sharply defined. But then the process ceases to be legitimate as soon as it is consciously adopted as a principle of action. It is well when bigots gradually relax their claims from a dumb instinct that they must be modified;

but I dispute the wisdom of a deliberate imitation of this natural process by men whose special claim to honour is their love of truth at all hazards.

But why complain of honourable and excellent men who are doing their best according to the lights they possess? Why, the infidel will ask, should we quarrel with the men who are unconsciously co-operating within the walls with the attack from without? Pray leave them burrowing and undermining and sapping the old foundations. Do not interfere with their operations by cruelly unmasking their real tendency. The appeal thus made, as the orthodox Christian will urge, is insidious. You are inviting men to come into the outer court of the sanctuary in the hope that they will leave it altogether; to take one step down hill in the full belief that once launched on the fatal slope they will descend it with accelerated rapidity. From your point of view the policy of such advice is obvious; but the fact that you approve it should be a reason to him for suspecting it—in both of which arguments there is undoubtedly some truth. If it were one's ultimate object to destroy the Church of England, one would not much object to the methods pursued by the Broad Church party. One might wrap onesself in Machiavelian complacency, and smile at the spectacle of contending sections, each accusing the other with equal plausibility of insincerity or stupidity, and agreeing only in provoking the contempt of outsiders. Take your own road to ruin, one might say; internal

dissensions will do as well as open secession; and we will not help to smother any incipient rationalism by insisting upon its legitimate consequences. It is true also that the advice may fairly be regarded with suspicion by those to whom it is addressed, so far as the value of an argument depends upon the source from which it proceeds. And yet I think that there is a sufficient reason for speaking plainly in this matter; not only because I believe the criticisms just made to be well founded, but because they seem to require emphatic assertion. It is not desirable that we should look on as indifferent spectators, even if we are convinced that the Churches are hopelessly doomed. We all have a very deep interest in the method of the transformation as well as in its result; for the value of sincerity of fair discussion is independent of the particular service in which they may be employed.

The reason, in fact, for plain speaking, is precisely that the leaders of the Broad Church party are in the main honest and able men, and one grudges the waste of honesty and ability in these fruitless efforts to reconcile the irreconcilable. If we had lived a century or two ago, criticism of this kind would have been out of place. The liberal theologians of the past days of the Church of England undoubtedly rendered great services to freedom of thought by adopting a course at first sight identical. In those days, the alliance of reason and theology was spontaneous and concealed no hidden misgivings. Men like Chillingworth, or Barrow,

or Tillotson, or even Butler, intricate and cramped as was his reasoning, spoke out like men; they had nothing to conceal and no lurking doubts hidden away in dark corners of their minds. The deist might argue that they were mistaken; he might argue, as in fact he frequently did, that the logical inference from their principles was favourable to his own views, but he had no ground for imputing to them anything like insincerity. In a later generation we first find ourselves listening to hired advocates rather than to searchers for truth at any price, and the artificial character of the creed begins to make itself felt. Paley, of whom it is now the fashion to speak with contempt, partly caused by his utter inability to be obscure, was amongst the first writers who systematically endeavoured to lower the meaning of subscription. Papists, Anabaptists, and Puritans—meaning by the last name persons who are hostile to the principle of an Established Church—ought not to subscribe the Articles, but almost anybody else may do so by virtue of the magical formula about converting 'articles of faith' into 'articles of peace.' Broad Churchmen are specially given to sneering at poor Paley's mechanical religion, and his confusion of morality with expediency; but they have adopted and elevated into a great principle this which is amongst the most questionable of his theories. Now it is the open avowal of such a doctrine, and the habitual application of it as a basis of reasoning and a justification of action, that gives even

opponents a right to complain. So long as a Christian is preaching pure rationalism, but preaching it quite unconsciously, we may accept his alliance without discredit on either side. But when he becomes conscious of the divergence between his words and their plain meaning, and justifies his practice, we have a right to insist on a distinct answer to some obvious questions. What are the limits of the liberty which he claims? Does he disapprove of Mr. Voysey's mode of straining words? If so, where does he draw the line? If not, what is the amount of equivocation which he will permit? Is it possible to be dishonest in the use of religious language? It is absolutely necessary, he says, to allow the mixture of some alloy in the coins which pass for sound bullion. How much may be admitted? May the coins be made altogether of alloy? and, if so, what is the difference between a forger and an honest man? Can it really be maintained that the essential thing is to use the proper stamp and not to deal in the genuine article? In short, if the duty of plainspeaking be admitted in some senses, where are the limitations which you would set to it?

Such reflections may be commended to the able and honest men—I do not mean to indulge in any irony after the model of Anthony's—who have so many claims to our respect, for they may be well assured that upon their giving a distinct answer to them depends their power of exercising a healthy influence. Freedom of enquiry is a very different thing from

freedom of speech, if by the latter phrase be meant the liberty of using any words in any sense; and it is an unpleasant phenomenon when we see both kinds of freedom claimed with the same earnestness by some of the best men of our time. Meanwhile the outside world has pretty well made up its mind. The services rendered to the cause of freethinking by the Broad Church party are undeniable; but the services rendered are beginning to be eclipsed by the disservice in proportion as the effort with which they obey two masters becomes palpable and recognised. The care with which the blinkers have to be adjusted is so great that one can hardly believe the operation to be performed by a blind instinct. Not many years ago, young men were chiefly struck by the candour and freedom of thought of the new school of preachers. Now I suspect that the impression produced is very different. It is painful and humiliating to witness the effort with which these gentlemen maintain their perilous attitude of unstable equilibrium. It is melancholy to see so much genuine fervour running to waste, not in preaching the truths which are most urgently needed, but in trying to make fiction do the work of truth. A man who would do good work in this world must throw aside every weight and free himself from all unnecessary fetters. These teachers voluntarily encumber themselves with needless burdens and waste infinite ingenuity in trying to move just as though they were free. In proportion as one feels the necessity of forcible preaching of great truths

in this distracted state of things, one is vexed and disgusted by the thought that those who share that sense and who have the greatest capacity for influencing men's minds, waste their power in an attempt to square circles. Our natural guides stray from the straightforward path in pursuit of a mere *ignis fatuus*. There is always cowardice, and hypocrisy, and shuffling enough in the world ready to take advantage of any decent excuse provided by misguided skill. There is even more disposition to take refuge in the really immoral form of scepticism, that, namely, which assumes that as truth is unattainable it can do no harm to tell lies. Both these tendencies are encouraged by the piteous sacrifice of intellect and candour involved in the hopeless attempt to cling to the Thirty-nine Articles. It is about time that such attempts should cease, for the practical tendency of Broad Church teaching is not, as formerly, to convince young men that it is possible to be at once rational and christian, but to convince them that it is possible to be at once rational and clergymen, which is a very different thing.

CHAPTER II.

RELIGION AS A FINE ART.

'In the first of Queen Elizabeth,' says Fuller, 'Scripture-plays were acted even in the church itself; which, in my opinion, the more pious the more profane, stooping faith to fancy and abusing the majesty of God's word. Such pageants might inform, not edify, though indulged the weakness of that age. For, though children may be *played* into learning, all must be *wrought* into religion, by ordinances of divine institution, and the means ought to be as serious as the end is sacred.' We have become wiser since the days of the quaint historian. The Ammergau play has been the means of our conversion. The representation of the death of the Saviour of mankind has been performed to a series of crowded and enthusiastic audiences; it has had a run sufficient to rouse the envy of the managers of London or Paris. The simple-minded peasantry, who, twenty years ago, had it all to themselves and, ten years ago, received a mere sprinkling of curious observers from the outside world, have, during the last two seasons, been elbowed by Englishmen following each other with true tourist docility. Ten years hence,

Ammergau will hardly be able to contain its visitors, unless some enterprising speculator runs up a monster hotel; and what is to come of the succeeding representations if curiosity increases at its present ratio is difficult even to be imagined. The literature which has sprung up upon the subject may possibly justify one who has not been present in fancying that he can form some vague picture of the general features of the scene; though it is true that every description begins by saying that nothing but ocular inspection can convey even an inadequate idea of its wonders. Yet, if we disavow the least intention of criticising the performance itself, perhaps something may be said, without offence, of the effect invariably produced upon the minds of the spectators. One cannot but wonder, for example at the complete absence from their narratives of any trace of such sentiments as I have quoted from Fuller. The suspicion that there might perhaps be something irreverent in a performance so alien to our modern ideas is noticed only to be emphatically repudiated. A man who should avow himself to be ever so little shocked by the representation of the crucifixion upon the stage would be hooted out of court as a Philistine of the deepest dye. One universal chorus of unmixed admiration has been raised from all sides. Every superlative in the language has been heaped upon the play and the actors. The distribution of praise has indeed been so lavish that perhaps some of us have been conscious of a certain feeble re-

calcitration and a faint wish, half-formed and most carefully guarded from utterance, that some one might have the courage to express a shade of dissent. But the only muttering of disapproval that has reached our ears has been a remark, that the crowing of St. Peter's cock was not quite up to the mark, and that the colouring of some of the dresses was not quite perfect. Assert that Shakspeare was no poet, that Newton was a feeble mathematician, that Raphael was a poor painter, and Mozart a second-rate musician; but, on penalty of a kind of æsthetic excommunication, you are forbidden to find fault with the mystery at Ammergau. And yet many of those whose enthusiasm was thus excited were men from whom any sparks of that kind are hard to elicit. Professed cynics and unbelievers, radical attorneys, unimaginative stockbrokers, and even Dissenting ministers, have joined in the universal laudation. From all which it may be safely inferred that, in its way, the Ammergau mystery must be singularly impressive and absolutely free from some of the failings which we should have been inclined to anticipate.

But there is another inference with which we are more concerned. These ardent admirers admit with one voice, that this most impressive spectacle is hopelessly doomed. They agree that it is a relic of an earlier phase of thought, preserved along with an expiring form of society in the folds of the Alps, and that it would perish if transplanted to a different climate. They fear that even their admiration will

be fatal. The influx of new admirers will sophisticate the native simplicity of the performers; with a breath of the outside it will vanish as the old kings who melt into dust when some tumulus is broken open after the lapse of centuries. Indeed, one zealot has gone so far as to propose that means should be taken for excluding strangers from the country. He would condemn the villagers to permanent exile from the nineteenth century, in order that so beautiful a relic of mediævalism may not be destroyed. They should be protected by a Chinese seclusion for the benefit of our æsthetic perceptions. At first sight this is rather a bold proposal; and yet, as we look closer, we perceive that its strangeness consists rather in its modesty than in its audacity. To condemn one little village in the Alps to permanent exile into the Middle Ages is a trifle when there is so general a desire to apply the same remedy to the whole world. The civilised races of Europe are suffering from a disease which, in clerical language, is generally put down as atheism: elsewhere it will have to be stamped out; here it has fortunately not yet penetrated, and there may be a chance of keeping it at bay by a properly devised spiritual quarantine. Something, indeed, may be done by a judicious use of disinfectants and prophylactics, even in the districts where it is most rife. If no physical line of separation can be established, yet there are means known to science by which the contagion may be prevented from spreading. The little flock of true

believers may mingle with a sceptical world and yet may preserve here and there small cities of refuge, where no doubt may be whispered, and mutual sympathy may stimulate their powers of faith. But as it is impossible for anyone living in such places as London and Paris not occasionally to rub shoulders with the wicked, as we cannot all retire into cloisters and place ourselves behind locks and bars, there is need of a more portable form of protection. Each genuine believer is therefore encouraged to erect an impassable barrier—not between himself and the infidel world—but across his own mind. Let him divide his thoughts from each other, so that no contagion can pass from one sphere to the other. His intellect will resemble one of those ships which are built in water-tight compartments. Even if the deluge of infidelity pours into one part of his mind, he will be scarcely less buoyant and secure of rising above the surges. Or perhaps it may be said with more propriety, that such a person resembles the cataleptic patients who lead two separate existences—one in dreamland, and one in the ordinary world of human beings. In one life he will deal with facts, with science, and Darwinism, and blue books, and political economy; in the other he wanders through a beautiful but shadowy region, where romance takes the place of history, and poetry of reasoning. He will retire into a remote chamber of his brain, and there repose untroubled by any contact with hard realities, as Crusoe, when he had drawn up his ladders, felt

secure from the cannibals. He will care no more for historical criticism as applied to the Gospels than he would care for testing the geographical accuracy of Dante's descriptions of heaven and hell. As Prior complained of being forced to swear to the truth of a song, he will think it ridiculous to be invited to subscribe to the truth of a creed. Cavillings, like those of poor Bishop Colenso, will be triumphantly answered by the remark that the application of a similar mode of arguing would show that Brobdingnag and Lilliput never existed. In short, Religion will become one of the fine arts, and have no more root in the world of fact. The two modes of thought will belong to different spheres, which can by no possibility be brought into collision.

That some such system is, in fact, very prevalent may be inferred with some probability from the general admiration of the Ammergau play. Why, in fact, should anybody be shocked by the representation of the most touching story that has ever appealed to human sympathy? The old Puritans, who swept away so much that was beautiful, had a prosaic way of adhering to the letter, and were not refined enough to understand the difference between a symbol and a downright assertion. When they were told that the Second Person of the Trinity was incarnate in human flesh, they actually supposed that they were listening to a statement of fact. Though the full meaning of the words transcended all human intelligence, they

nevertheless believed that, without any figurative interpretation, Jesus Christ was really divine as well as human. Consequently it shocked them as one would expect it to shock anyone who shared their belief, to see a good-looking peasant part his hair in the middle and declare himself to be the representative of his Saviour. They would have thought the performance as profane as we should still think it profane (so at least one may venture to assume for the present), if a venerable old man with a full beard enacted the part of God the Father. Such a scene as the crucifixion had a significance too awful to become an object of artistic treatment. Heaven and hell were realities, and the means by which the Divine wrath was turned from sinners could only be contemplated in moods of the most solemn adoration. Something of this kind would be the old Protestant feeling. We have changed all that. We can recognise the beauty of the Christian legend without troubling ourselves about its historic truth. The idealisation of suffering is equally pathetic whether embodied in a myth or in an authentic narrative. Phrases about the divinity of Christ are superlatives to which it is unnecessary or impossible to attach any definite meaning. To talk about heaven and hell and redemption is merely a picturesque way of expressing abhorrence for gross and disgusting habits. Worship is merely an agreeable mode of stimulating certain emotions without implying any particular theory as to the objects of worship; and

one method of treatment may be as effective as another. Nor, of course, is there any trace of irreverence in the performers themselves. The position which Christ occupies in their ordinary beliefs is in harmony with this mode of celebrating his history. He is the central figure in their Pantheon; the head of the saintly hierarchy; and except so far as he is superseded by his mother, the most useful patron at the court of heaven. In those innocent valleys the uncomfortable Protestant habit of demanding statements of fact has never perverted the natural developments of a popular mythology. They have never plunged into theological disputation after the fashion of the Scotch peasantry. There has been no discontinuity in their intellectual progress. One legend has grown up after another, as quietly as successive generations of pines have risen on the sides of their mountains. There has been no great dislocation of ideas, since their primitive paganism faded out before Christianity; and perhaps even then the old beliefs were as much transformed as superseded. Amongst such simple-minded people the figure of Christ takes its place naturally in a cycle of legends, whose truth or falsehood is simply an irrelevant question. His attributes are not for them defined by a dogmatic theology of which they know nothing, and the very existence of scepticism or critical enquiry is unsuspected. The popular imagination naturally rejects the divine in favour of the human elements, and Christ becomes a figure of singular beauty, admirably adapted

to be the subject of a dramatic representation. It is only when you insist upon identifying the hero of the popular imagination with the person whose attributes are defined in creeds, that there is any risk of the discord due to profanity. Forget all about the Thirty-nine Articles, the Trinitarian controversies, and dogmatic theology, and you need be no more shocked at bringing upon the stage the death of Christ than the death of Ali.

The frame of mind of those innocent peasants has an immense attraction for imaginative persons at the present day. They watch with infinite pain the decay of the old symbols, so intimately associated with the deepest emotions and loftiest aspirations of the poet. The world looks bleak and miserable as the temples fall into ruin, and the idols are broken down. The contest between science and the old theology becomes daily more implacable: it is in vain that the opponents on both sides, declare in the most emphatic language, that there is not, and cannot be, any fundamental opposition between the voice of God as revealed in the Scriptures and as revealed in the book of Nature. The proposition is undeniable, but unfortunately quite irrelevant to the question whether the Scriptures are, in fact, the voice of God. Equally idle is the other commonplace, that the Bible was intended to teach us science. If the Bible states that something is a fact which is not a fact, it makes no difference to call it a 'scientific fact.' It can hardly be seriously

urged, that an inspired book is at liberty to make erroneous statements on all matters which may become the subjects of accurate investigation—the only sense which can be made of the words. A reconciliation is required, founded on some deeper principle. The sacred images must be once and for all carried fairly beyond the reach of the spreading conflagration, not moved back step by step, suffering fresh shocks at every fresh operation. The radical remedy would be to convey them at once into the unassailable ground of the imagination. Admit that the Bible has nothing to do with facts of any kind, that theology and science have no common basis, because one deals with poetry and the other with prose. The sceptic's standing ground will be cut away from beneath his feet. He may tear to pieces any number of Scriptural statements, only to find that he has been venting his rage on an empty garment from which the living essence has withdrawn itself uninjured. Voltaire or Strauss may be allowed to do their worst with entire complacency. Whether there was or was not a Garden of Eden, or a Flood, or a Tower of Babel; whether the Jews ever walked dry-shod through the Red Sea; whether a priest could eat thirty-three pigeons in a minute; nay—to leave such trifles—whether there ever was upon this earth a living and moving human being called Jesus of Nazareth, would be matters of the most profound indifference.

In fact, we see that from the most opposite parties there is a curious convergence towards conclusions of

this kind. Those who believe that a supernatural guide is to be found, capable of deciding all religious controversies, have been hardly pressed to maintain their position. As our view of history widens, it becomes gradually more impossible for the imagination, to say nothing of the reason, to believe that any Pope or council has a monopoly of truth. The *à priori* demonstrations of the necessity of such a guide break down in face of the palpable fact that no such guidance has been vouchsafed to the overwhelming majority of the human race; and the more men examine the pretensions of the only body on whose behalf such claims are put forward, the more difficult it becomes to believe in the infallibility of its varying and contradictory oracles. The marks of its human origin are too plain, and its historical development too distinctly before us. But admit that the Pope is not, in the plain sense of words, a judge of controversies, but a master of the ceremonies, and the difficulty disappears. If one doctrine is as good as another, so far as its relation to facts is concerned, or, in other words, if it has no relation to facts at all, there are manifold advantages in accepting an authority which may secure unity of rites and discipline. Legislation, palpably out of place in the sphere of reason, may perhaps be admitted in matters of imagination. We may accept that particular set of idols which an intelligent priesthood thinks likely to be the most useful, if they do not ask us to believe that they represent realities.

The doctrine by which such a system may be supported has been already partly elaborated. Our assents, we are told, are not to follow our reason, but to outrun it by some indefinite quantity. We are to believe dogmas, not because their truth can be established by the ordinary processes of observation and induction, but partly also because they give a certain satisfaction to our emotions. So long as reason is admitted to have any part in the matter, it is to be feared that its corroding influence will still make itself felt; it will be always eating away the base upon which these beautiful superstructures have been reared, and slowly but inevitably they will crumble into dust. The only satisfactory result will be reached when reasoning of this kind is pushed to its logical extreme. The division between faith and reason is a half-measure, till it is frankly admitted that faith has to do with fiction, and reason with fact. Then the two spheres of thought may be divided by so profound a gulf that each of the rival methods may be allowed its full scope without interfering with the other. There will be, for example, an ecclesiastical and a secular solar system; the earth may in one system revolve round the sun, and in the other the sun may revolve round the earth, without the smallest possibility of a collision. The only meaning of accepting a doctrine on authority to the exclusion of reason, when the words are fearlessly examined, is accepting it whether it is true or not. The Virgin Mother is a lovely symbol in the region of true

poetry; but once admit that historical criticism is to be permitted to enquire into the truth of the legends about her life or into the competency of the authority on which they are to be accepted, and no one can answer for the results. Sooner or later that 'inexorable logic,' of which we sometimes hear, must either commit suicide by admitting the extreme sceptical conclusion that all reason is fallacious, or must regard religious truth as merely a variety of what is known as artistic truth. Doctrines must be subjected to the test of their imaginative harmony, instead of the scrutiny of the verifying faculty.

The tendency is equally marked, though it produces a different set of results, amongst the opposite religious party. The more we study the writings of the liberal school of theologians, the more we are struck by the constant recurrence of certain difficulties. They are perpetually troubled by the rigid dogmas, and the still more rigid facts, which they are compelled to work into their system. They labour with almost pathetic earnestness to soften the harsh outlines of the old-fashioned doctrine, and to put new wine into the old bottles. The dogmas undergo a change like that of a fossil shell, where the form remains, but the whole substance has been gradually exchanged. And yet, manipulate language as you will, you cannot quite get rid of its early associations. The doctrine of the sacraments has an insuperable tendency to sacerdotal magic. Hell may be proved to be the most unobjectionable place conceivable, and yet it has a certain sul-

phurous flavour about it. The Athanasian Creed, after all has been said that can be said, is still an inconvenient form of words for expressing hatred of sectarian dogmatism. The necessity of retaining some sort of historical basis for belief is equally irritating. The essential doctrine of the school is that a divine element is to be found in every creed; and that religion can neither stand nor fall by the result of a critical enquiry into facts. Every possible contempt is thrown upon poor Paley and his like, who fancied that they could try the truth of Christianity as one would try an issue of fact before a jury. The miracles upon which our simple ancestors laid so much stress are admitted to be rather a scandal than a source of edification. Faith is declared to rest on an incomparably wider and firmer basis. The doctrine may be true, and is certainly attractive in many ways. And yet, after it has been announced in the broadest and boldest manner, we somehow find the old evidences coming back. After declaring that dogmatic formulæ and historical statements are mere empty shells, of no significance to the spirit of man, we discover that, in some sense or other, the knowledge of a certain set of events which happened in Palestine eighteen hundred years ago is of vital importance to mankind. We are told, with abundant eloquence, that belief in Christ, and not the acceptance of certain dogmas about Christ, is that which is imperatively required. And yet, when we try firmly to grasp this rather vague statement, we find that the

most abstruse dogmas convey truths unspeakably refreshing to the soul, and that belief in them is the salt of the earth. The logical conclusion to which these thinkers are tending would be, that the emotion, and not the opinion, is of vital consequence; but frankly to accept that conclusion would be to part company with Christianity of the historical kind. Willing as they are to soar altogether above the groundwork of fact, they are still brought back to it by the fear of floating off into mere vague cloudland of Pantheism. The cord, so often strained, must snap at last. Christianity must be made independent of history, and the difficulty will disappear. The rigid framework will dissolve of itself, and religion become merely the embodiment in concrete images of the spiritual aspirations of mankind. There is no longer a pretext for describing as dishonest the use of a dogma to express the precise contrary of what it once meant. Milton might appropriate a classical myth, or Goethe a mediæval legend, to express modern conceptions; and we may take equal liberties with the picturesque imagery of the early Christians. We shall not be asked to believe that the Gospels are true, in the sense in which a newspaper report is true, but merely that they have an artistic truth as representing a noble phase of human nature. The evidences and the dogmas may be finally dismissed to the limbo of Dryasdust.

'Whoever,' says Mr. Pattison, 'would take the religious literature of the present day as a whole, and

endeavour to make out clearly on what basis revelation is supposed by it to rest; whether on authority, on the inward light or reason, on self-evidencing Scripture, or on the combination of the four, or some of them, or in what proportions—would probably find that he had undertaken a perplexing, but not altogether profitless enquiry.' But it seems doubtful whether this enumeration exhausts all possibilities. None of the four bases, at least, seem to lead us to the purely modern conception, that of a religion raised on a purely æsthetic basis; accepted, not because it is true, but because it is beautiful. Certain old-fashioned prejudices may oppose its adoption, and yet it would seem that by this path alone we can arrive at that truly Catholic religion, so ardently desired by so many different sects. A dogma is only offensive when you are asked to believe it; but we may be all members of a Church in which a dogma is no more essential than a vestment, and is simply an arbitrary sign of certain emotions. Indeed, by this method we may reach a catholicism wider than has ever yet dawned upon the imagination of mankind. Why should we be debarred from any legend which, as Mr. Tennyson puts it, the supreme Caucasian mind has carved out of nature for itself? The Virgin Mother and the suffering God may be the most impressive of types; but there is beauty also in the innumerable creeds embodied in the old Pagan worship. Why should not the gods come back from the exile so pathetically described by Heine?

They cannot quite take their old place, and must doubtless condescend more or less to put on the livery of the Galilean; but if provided with proper costumes by cultivated artists, and approved by a judicious priesthood, they might once more see the old celebrations revived, and the feasts of at least the more respectable deities celebrated with an imitation of the old fervour. Christianity was rather too hard upon the old superstitions, even whilst pressing many of them into its service. Why should religion be deprived for ever of the element which the Greek sense of beauty contributed to art and poetry? Why should our devotions be attenuated with the meagre and repulsive forms due to the mediæval imagination? Let us have a judicious eclecticism, such as is already provided in art, where classical and mediæval revivalisms appear to subsist in friendly rivalry. The public mind is already prepared for the change. The popular commonplace is, that all religions come to the same thing, though dissevered by a few external excrescences. The spirit is one, though its manifestations are many. A new Eirenikon may be proposed with more hope of acceptance, when theologians have once recognised the truth already perceived by the multitude, that one set of dogmas is pretty much as good as another.

The great change which has taken place in apologetic literature may be perhaps expressed thus. It is no longer argued that the orthodox solution is the only credible solution, but that it is a credible solution.

It is not said, if you examine the whole history, follow science to its legitimate conclusions, and grapple boldly with metaphysical difficulties, you will find yourself inevitably driven to accept the orthodox creed; but it is urged, more modestly if not more conclusively, that, whatever difficulties may be raised, they are not so great as to make belief in that creed impossible. Nobody says that the position of the man of science is untenable if you choose to accept his point of view; but it is argued, that if you train yourself properly, and look at matters judiciously, you may still work yourself up to accept the other position. The argument from evidence is superseded by the argument from morality or the argument from taste. The old religion is so beautiful and so convenient, that it is a pity to give it up, until it is untenable to the imagination as well as to the reason. Whether you evade the conflict between science and theology, by saying that the ancient dogmas are to be accepted without any reference to reason, or to be accepted because they may be twisted into any meaning whatever, or to be accepted simply because you can get up a sham-belief in them if you try very hard, you are equally approximating to the same principle that they belong to the sphere of poetry instead of history. This view once boldly accepted, controversies may disappear as simply inapplicable, and we are on the road to the eclectic faith, combining all that is lovely in the creeds of all persuasions.

And yet, attractive as the vision may be, there is still a difficulty or two in the way of its realisation. The old Puritan leaven is working still in various forms, in spite of the ridicule of artistic minds and the contempt of philosophers. A religion to be of any value must retain a grasp upon the great mass of mankind, and the mass are hopelessly vulgar and prosaic. The ordinary Briton persists in thinking that the words 'I believe' are to be interpreted in the same sense in a creed or a scientific statement. His appetite wants something more than 'theosophic moonshine.' He expects that messages from that undiscovered country, whence no traveller returns, should be as authentic as those which Columbus brought from America. He wants to draw aside the mystery by which our little lives are bounded, and to know whether there is, in fact, a beyond and a hereafter. He fancies that it is a matter of practical importance to know whether there is a heaven where he will be eternally rewarded, or a hell where he will be eternally tortured. He does not see that it really makes no difference whether those places have an objective existence or are merely the projections upon the external world of certain inward emotions. He is so inquisitive that he insists upon knowing whether the word God is to be applied to a being who will interfere, more or less, with his life, or is merely a philosophical circumlocution for the unvarying order of nature. One fiction may do as well as another in poetry, and

may be taken up or laid down as the artist pleases; but he supposes that his readiness to pick pockets or cut throats will, more or less, depend upon whether he believes that God or humanity is the centre of the universe; that priests are licensed manufacturers of myths, or ambassadors revealing supernatural secrets; that the approval of men or the prospect of future reward is to be the mainspring of his conduct here. He imagines, in short, that, though certain commonplaces are common to all systems of morality, his character and the general tendency of his actions will be profoundly influenced by the view of his position on earth placed before him by his instructors. Protestants, and Papists, and Positivists, all condemn murder and praise benevolence in general terms, but there are, or so he fancies, profound differences in the type of morality which results from absorbing the influences of those rival systems. Of course, he is shortsighted and stupid. The differences of doctrine are superficial, and will die away of themselves. The one objectionable thing is to believe anything very strongly; that is bigoted, and makes a man painfully narrow-minded. Look at all religions from the serene heights of philosophy, and you must admit that all are beautiful in their way, and may be turned to account by the genuine liberal. Dr. Newman expounds a very beautiful and touching creed, so does Comte, and possibly even Mr. Bradlaugh. Let us agree to differ. Those who find it pleasant to their imaginations may

dwell upon St. Paul's aspirations for immortality, and others may prefer, in the words of a modern poet,

> To thank with brief thanksgiving
> Whatever Gods may be
> That no life lives for ever,
> That dead men rise up never,
> That even the weariest river
> Winds somewhere safe to sea!

There are times at which one conception is most appropriate, and times at which we may prefer the other. Why go on struggling, and arguing, and forcing our neighbours to share our opinions? It is as unphilosophical as to insist upon everybody preferring Gothic or Greek architecture, instead of taking the modern ground of judicious eclecticism, and loving all styles of art, all types of morality, and all systems of religion. The opposite line of conduct is worthy only of the petty tradesman who carries calculations of profit and loss to an inappropriate sphere, and asks for motives as tangible as pounds, shillings, and pence, when he ought to be content with lovely poetical reasons.

And yet, even when our prosaic friends are thoroughly suppressed, and made properly ashamed of themselves, we are not quite at the end of the question. Let us give up the question of fact, and admit that the demand for truth in a creed is utterly unreasonable, so far as its influence upon our lives is concerned. Still there remains an æsthetic perplexity. Can even an art—if religion is to be definitely an art—

be noble and genuine when entirely divorced from reality? That desired separation between the two lobes of the brain is not so easily managed as might be wished. A sort of chemical reaction is set up in spite of all walls of division. You cannot combine the mythology which is the spontaneous growth of one stage of intellectual development, with the scientific knowledge characteristic of another. Even the poetical imagination requires some stronger sustenance than can be derived from mere arbitrary fancies or the relics of exploded traditions. The gods of the Pagan pantheon led a kind of posthumous existence in poetry long after they had died out of the living faith of the world; but they suffered from a slow but inevitable decay, which made them too shadowy, by degrees, even for poetical use. Invocations of the Muse became very uninteresting when the Muse had become what, according to some philosophers, the Christian duty is in danger of becoming—a mere philosophical formula. The highest poetry must always express emotions excited by the deepest convictions of the time. A modern Dante, if such a person existed, could no longer compose a Divine Comedy, when placed in the chilling medium of modern scepticism. Descartes, says Pascal, tried to do without God, but was obliged to retain him in order to give a fillip to start the machinery of the universe. A God of this kind—a mere *roi fainéant*, a constitutional king, secured from our sight by responsible ministers in the

shape of second causes—will hardly stir the vehement passions which burst spontaneously into verse. The psalms sung in his honour would be as languid as the feelings he inspires. A God who is not allowed even to make a fly or launch a thunderbolt will be worshipped in strains widely different from those which celebrated the Ruler who clothed the horse's neck with thunder, and whose voice shook the wilderness. The prevalent conceptions of the day will somehow permeate its poetry—if it has any—in spite of all that can be done to keep them out. Shakspeare and Bacon were not independent phenomena, brought together by an accidental coincidence. They were rooted in the same soil, and the impulse, though it led to different manifestations, was ultimately derived from the same sources.

This, of course, is a commonplace; but we have a device in modern times for evading the apparent conclusion. We are, it is said, pre-eminently an historical age; our special function is the critical. We do not produce original thought, but live upon examining and dressing up the accumulated inheritance of our ancestors. We want the simplicity and the freshness which was necessary to produce new forms of art or faith. Indeed, when we come across regions in which such forms still linger, we are apt to spoil them by our touch. The native dress of India disappears in favour of Manchester prints, and perhaps native religions may be superseded in time by equally vulgar forms of European

superstition. The remedy is to be found in that judicious spirit of revivalism which is now so popular. We must learn to cherish instead of destroying. Since Scott revealed to us the surprising fact that mediæval knights and ladies were real human beings, instead of names in a book, and succeeded in impressing that fact upon the world at large, we have made surprising progress. We have been reviving all manner of things once supposed to be hopelessly dead. We have succeeded in building churches so carefully modelled after the old patterns, that William of Wykeham might rise from the dead and fancy that his old architects were at work. Nay, we have revived the men themselves. We have clergymen who succeed in accomplishing very fairly the surprising feat of living in two centuries at once; and the results are held to be infinitely refreshing and commendable. We have been just told, for example, that our new courts of law must be unimpeachable because there is not a window or a tower in them which might not have been built just as well six hundred years ago. Poets can affect an infantile lisp, and tell us legends of old times as naturally as if human beings at the present day had still a lively interest in them. We have undoubtedly obtained some very pretty results, and have a beautiful new set of toys, which we may persuade ourselves are almost capable of living and moving. There is only one objection to our complete success. The more skilfully we imitate obsolete modes of art or religion the more palpably dead they

become. One of our modern imitations of an ancient church resembles its original as minutely as the Chinese imitation of a steam-engine, the only fault of which is that it won't work. The old building was the natural production of men working freely, by all means in their power, to give expression to their feelings: the new building is the work of men fettered by the self-imposed law that they will use the forms invented in an epoch permeated by different creeds, aspirations, and emotions. A genuine revival could only be produced by reproducing all the intellectual and social conditions under which the old art arose; and in that case it would have a spontaneous resurrection. Till then we shall only see what we see now—spasmodic attempts to be pretty and picturesque, with infinite antiquarian labour, and yet, with all our products marked by that feebleness of constitution characteristic of any natural or artificial object forcibly transplanted to an uncongenial medium.

In art, it may be said, there is room for such methods. There can be no reason why the poet or the painter should not help us to enter into the spirit of the past, and to contemplate with pleasure the picturesque and graceful forms from which all vitality has departed. Speaking frankly, indeed, art of this kind, whether it takes the shape of the careful historical romance or of the pictorial representation, is apt to be rather oppressive. At best it is fitted chiefly for decorative purposes. The emotions to which it appeals are those

with which we enter a museum, not those with which we enter a church. But, at any rate, an art which has become entirely parasitical must fall into decay. The method is in fact inapplicable to the loftier forms amongst which, one would suppose, religion must be reckoned. The passionate and deep emotions, to which the highest art is owing, must burst forth in spontaneous and original expression. A great orator must use the language of his day; he cannot stop to pick and choose his words, and see that he has in every case the authority of Addison or Johnson's Dictionary. If preaching is bad at the present day, it is because it generally resembles an egg-dance, where the performer is afraid of coming into collision at every step with one of the Thirty-nine Articles. The growing interest in past ages, and the warm appreciation of what was good in them, which should have led us to investigate the principles on which our ancestors acted, has too often led us to a servile mimicry of their results. Admiring the imposing aspect of a great spiritual power which reposed on the profoundest convictions of mankind, and provided harmonious expression for their strongest emotions, people attempt to retrieve that happy state of things by obeying the same power when it is opposed to all our deepest convictions, and when it is impossible to use its forms without unnaturally cramping our understandings. What was once spontaneous tends to become a masquerade, where the actors are nervous and constrained by the fear of acting out of character.

It is characteristic that the commonest bit of advice now administered to the French people is not that they should cultivate that virtue of veracity of which their late experience should have taught them the importance; but that they should cling to any fragments of belief which remain amongst them, as though dogma acted like a charm even when it rested not upon conviction, but upon a persuasion of its convenience. The way to national salvation, it seems, is not to be found by looking facts in the face and daring to speak the truth; but by invoking the help of ecclesiastical puppets, and trying hard to imagine them to be more than mere rags and wood. Is there a more contemptible sight in this world than a French Voltairian preaching about the excellence of faith, considered as a pill to cure the social earthquakes? Or should we want any other explanation of French defeats, if we believed in the prevalence of the sentiments implied by one of the ministry in a saying worthy of Bossuet (so the newspapers called it), namely, that you could not expect men to fight unless you promised that they should be paid for it in another life? Fanaticism, indeed, will make men fight; but it is a delicate operation deliberately to manufacture it out of extinct creeds for the purpose.

Most contemporary teaching is the product of amiable sentimentalism and intellectual indolence. We shrink with effeminate dislike from all that is severe and melancholy in the old creeds. Our ears are

too polite to be shocked by the mention of hell. We wrap ourselves in a complacent optimism; and the only form of faith which seems to have no chance of revival is that which endeavoured to look things boldly in the face, and refused to evade the more awful consequences of theology. Religion is to be an opiate instead of a stimulant. Christianity is to mean nothing but the Sermon on the Mount; and its historical basis and distinctive dogmas are to be withdrawn as much as possible from view. We are told, in substance, that if you take away from Christianity all the peculiarities by which it is distinguished from other religions, there will remain a very amiable system of morality; and this is put forward in perfectly good faith as a sufficient reason for accepting it. The residuum thus left is explained to be identical with the very estimable doctrine dispersed through popular novelists and the leaders of the 'Daily Telegraph.' It will do very well for comfortable middle-class people, who have no particular reason to be discontented with the world, and are not apt to perplex themselves with speculative difficulties. The learned writer who has converted the Gospels into materials for a very pretty French romance is generally stigmatised as an infidel; but his method is substantially that of most popular preachers. Let us all be very amiable, turn away our eyes from the doubts which beset thinkers, and the evils which drive men to revolution, and we may manage to get along with a very comfortable, pictu-

resque, and old-established belief. Such, we may fancy, was the attitude of mind of many of the spectators of the Ammergau play. They saw no irreverence in the play, though, perhaps, they might have found something irreverent in the more free-spoken products of the robust faith of older times.

The absence of profanity is, indeed, less a proof of the vitality of the performance than an indication that it has passed into the academical and unreal stage, and is properly superintended by modern professors of æsthetics. It would be as impossible now to introduce any ribaldry on such an occasion as to allow Cato to appear on the stage in a full-bottomed wig. We have become extremely exacting as to the harmony and keeping, and terribly afraid of an anachronism. That is just because the whole affair is to us, whatever it may be to the performers, a mere artistic performance, and is entirely divorced from any reference to fact. A modern religious painting is very certain not to offend against the accepted canons of good taste, for the very reason that it appeals to no stronger sentiments. Costumes have become more perfect, and the proprieties of time and place are more carefully observed, in proportion as the old animating influence has been withdrawn. And the same progress in propriety and the same decay in intensity is visible in our other religious observances. Nobody, except some vulgar Dissenter, dares now to make a joke in a sermon any more than he cares to start a new heresy. Those are symptoms

of a period of superabundant energy and vitality; not of a time when we are eminently respectable, dull, and decorous. And yet we have become so much accustomed to this mode of regarding religions, that it has passed into a kind of axiom that our creeds cannot be beautiful unless they are in some degree false. We have seen it lately asserted, that the modern view of Christianity is that it is the depository of the profoundest truths although the history is an entire delusion. That is to say, in plain language, that you must tell a certain number of lies in order to secure the acceptance of a certain quantity of truth. Pure unmixed truth is too dazzling for the vulgar mind. It must be judiciously adulterated, and combined with a skilfully composed alloy of myth and legend, in order to impress the popular imagination. It is difficult to put into words a more complete expression of utter scepticism; and we may safely assume that no enduring superstructure can be raised upon so unsafe a foundation. One may, indeed, manufacture a dilettante religion; something which to professors of æsthetics will appear to be exceedingly graceful and pretty, but which will fail really to touch the hearts and consciences of mankind. Even its own advocates admit that a doctrine of this kind is intended as a mere stop-gap; it is intended to patch up a difficulty, and to make a secure paving across which we may pass to revolutionary conclusions. But surely it is better, here as elsewhere, to look our perplexities in the face; to give up this feeble attempt at vamping

up old dogmas to look as good as new. We must be content to abandon much that is beautiful and that once was excellent. But the more we really believe that religion is founded upon enduring instincts which will find an expression in one form or another, the less anxious we should be to retain the old formulæ, and the more confident that by saying what we think, in the plainest possible language, we shall be really taking the shortest road to discovering the new doctrines which will satisfy at once our reason and our imagination. The reluctance to part company with beliefs which have been so valuable in their day is in every way amiable and respectable; but, however slow we may be to acknowledge the truth, it is in fact the worst compliment we can pay them, when we endeavour to make the mere empty shams do the work of realities, and try to play at believing when we can no longer believe in earnest. Certainly the first results of an endeavour to be perfectly sincere may be the destruction of many beautiful fancies with which we cannot part without a pang; but the plunge must be made, and the sooner it is made, the more quickly we shall arrive at a really satisfactory result.

CHAPTER III.

DARWINISM AND DIVINITY.

We are going through that change in regard to Mr. Darwin's speculations which has occurred so often in regard to scientific theories. When first propounded, divines regarded them with horror, and declared them to be radically opposed not only to the Book of Genesis, but to all the religious beliefs which elevate us above the brutes. The opinions have gained wider acceptance; and, whatever may be the ultimate verdict as to their soundness, it certainly cannot be doubted that they are destined profoundly to modify the future current of thought. As Darwinism has won its way to respectability, as it has ceased to be the rash conjecture of some hasty speculator, and is received with all the honours of grave scientific discussion, divines have naturally come to look upon it with different eyes. They have gradually sidled up towards the object which at first struck them as so dark and portentous a phenomenon, and discovered that after all it is not of so diabolic a nature as they had imagined. Its breath does not wither up every lofty aspiration, and every worthy conception of the destiny of humanity. Darwinists are not neces-

sarily hoofed and horned monsters, but are occasionally of pacific habits, and may even be detected in the act of going to church. Room may be made for their tenets alongside of the Thirty-nine Articles, by a little judicious crowding and re-arrangement. Some of the old literal interpretations of the Scriptures must perhaps be abandoned, but after all they were in far too precarious a position already to be worth much lamentation. It would be entirely unfair to accuse persons who have gone through this change of the smallest conscious insincerity. They are not merely endeavouring to curry favour with an adversary because he has become too formidable to be openly encountered. They have simply found out, in all honesty and sincerity, that the object of their terror has been invested with half his terrible attributes by their own hasty imagination. They are exemplifying once more the truth conveyed in an old story. A man hangs on to the edge of a precipice through the dark hours of the night, believing that if his grasp fails him he will be instantly dashed to a thousand fragments; at length his strength will bear it no longer, and he falls—only to discover that his feet had been all the time within a couple of inches of the ground. The precipice was a creation of his fancy, and the long agony entirely thrown away. So we may believe that a good many sound divines have resigned themselves to the inevitable plunge, and are astonished to find all their vital functions continuing to operate pretty nearly

as well after as before the catastrophe. Perhaps they feel rather foolish, though of course they do not say so. One could wish, certainly, that under these circumstances they would betray a little less uneasiness; and that the discovery that the doctrine is harmless might precede by a rather longer interval the admission that it is true. There would be less room for unkindly cavils. However, it is being discovered, in one way or other, that religion is really not interested in these discussions. We have lately seen, for example, in a very orthodox Romanist organ, that theology has nothing, or next to nothing, to say to Mr. Darwin's theories. It is permissible to believe either that man was made by a single act of the creative energy, or that a pair of apes was selected and improved gradually into humanity, as, if the comparison be admissible, human processes may gradually form the carrier-pigeon out of his wild congeners. We must, indeed, hold that the operation was miraculous; and as the tendency of scientific inquiry is to banish the miraculous, we may say that there is still a fundamental opposition between the teaching of the Church and Mr. Darwin. When we consider how easily the word 'miraculous' may itself be rarefied until no particular meaning is left, we may doubt whether this opposition may not be removed; the verdict of science as to the mode in which the phenomena succeeded each other might be accepted, though there would be a difference of opinion

as to the efficient cause of the change, and thus a kind of compromise is effected between the rival forces.

Meanwhile, whatever the validity of this and similar artifices, it may be worth while to consider a little more closely what is the prospect before us. Let us suppose that Darwinism is triumphant at every point. Imagine it to be demonstrated that the long line of our genealogy can be traced back to the lowest organisms; suppose that our descent from the ape is conclusively proved, and the ape's descent from the tidal animal, and the tidal animal's descent from some ultimate monad, in which all the vital functions are reduced to the merest rudiments. Or, if we will, let us suppose that a still further step has been taken, and the origin of life discovered, so that, by putting a certain mixture in a hermetically sealed bottle, we can create our own ancestors over again. When we endeavour firmly to grasp that conception, we are, of course, sensible of a certain shock. We have a prejudice or two derived from the Zoological Gardens and elsewhere, which, as it were, causes our gorge to rise; but when we have fairly allowed the conception to sink into our minds, when we have brought our other theories into harmony with it, and have lost that uncomfortable sense of friction and distortion which is always produced by the intrusion of a new set of ideas, what is the final result of it all? What is it that we have lost, and what have we acquired in its place? It is surely

worth while to face the question boldly, and look into the worst fears that can be conjured up by these terrible discoverers. Probably, after such an inspection, the thought that will occur to any reasonable man will be, what does it matter? What possible difference can it make to me whether I am sprung from an ape or an angel? The one main fact is that somehow or other I am here. How I came here may be a very interesting question to speculative persons, but my thoughts and sensations and faculties are the same on any hypothesis. Sunlight is just as bright if the sun was once a nebulous mass. The convenience of our arms and legs is not in the slightest degree affected by the consideration that our great-great-grandfathers were nothing better than more or less moveable stomachs. The poet's imagination and the philosopher's reason are none the worse because the only sign of life given by their ancestors was some sort of vague contractility in a shapeless jelly. Our own personal history, if we choose to trace it far enough back, has taken us through a series of changes almost equally extensive, and we do not think any the worse of ourselves on that account. Our affections and our intellectual faculties are in existence. They are the primary data of the problem, and as long as we are conscious of their existence we need not worry ourselves by asking whether they began to exist by some abrupt change or gradually rose into existence through a series of changes. There is still quite as much room

as ever for the loftiest dreams that visit the imaginations of saints or poets. The mode in which we express ourselves must, of course, be slightly altered; but so long as the same instincts exist which sought gratification in the old language, we need not doubt but they will frame a new one out of the changed materials of thought. The fact that religion exists is sufficient demonstration that men feel the need of loving each other, of elevating the future and the past above the present, and of rising above the purely sensual wants of our nature; the need will exist just as much, whether we take one view or other of a set of facts which, on any hypothesis, happened many thousands of years before we were born, and in regard to which a contented ignorance is far from being an impossible frame of mind. One can understand, after a little trouble, how it was that at a particular period of history people fancied that disinterested love would leave the world, and a moral chaos be produced, if it should be made to appear that it was not literally true that we are all descended from a man who was turned out of a garden for eating an apple. The infidels who assailed, and the orthodox who defended that dogma, really believed that it was an essential corner-stone in the foundations of all religion, which once removed, nothing but a universal crash could follow. Even the statement that it might possibly be an allegory instead of a historical record nearly frightened our prosaic ancestors out of their wits. Remove one brick from the cunningly

adjusted fabric of orthodoxy, prove that a line of the Hebrew Scriptures was erroneous, and God would vanish from the world, heaven and hell become empty names, all motives for doing good be removed, and the earth become a blank and dreary wilderness. In remote country towns and small clerical coteries some vestiges of this cheerful opinion still linger. Most men have grown beyond it, and have found some broader basis for their hopes and aspirations. And yet, when one comes to think about it, is not the alarm which has been caused by the statement that Adam was the great-grandson of an ape equally preposterous? Why should it have so fluttered the dove-cotes of the Church? If science could have proved divines to be apes themselves, there would have been some ground for vexation; but that was obviously out of the question, and their alarm would only prove that they were drawing some very unwarrantable inferences, or else by association of ideas had become unable to distinguish between the essence and the remotest accidental accompaniments of the faith. What interest can the highest part of our nature really take in a dispute as to whether certain facts did or did not occur many ages ago? The *primâ facie* presumption is, certainly, that any change in our opinions would affect rather the external imagery than the faith which it embodies. One would say at first sight that religion is no more likely to leave the world because we have new views as to the mode in which the world began, than poetry

to vanish as soon as we have ceased to believe in the historical accuracy of the siege of Troy. Man possesses certain spiritual organs, whose function it is to produce religion. Religion could only be destroyed by removing the organs, and not by supplying them with slightly different food.

The precise nature of the fears entertained by the orthodox is revealed by the arguments generally brought to bear against the new doctrine. There is, for example, what may be called the metaphysical argument, which has taken the place of the argument from the Book of Genesis. It is substantially an attempt to prove that the gap between the brute and the human mind is so wide that we cannot imagine it to be filled up by any continuous series. It is argued at great length that instinct differs from reason not in degree but in kind, or that brutes do not possess even the rudiments of what we call a moral sense. The argument has long been more or less familiar. Animals have always been regarded with a certain dislike by metaphysical arrogance. It has been held to be a conclusive objection to the validity of certain arguments for the immortality of the soul, that they would open the path to heaven to our dogs as well as to ourselves. It does not seem very easy to give any satisfactory reason for the extreme abhorrence with which such a consummation is regarded, or to say why we should claim a monopoly in another world which we do not enjoy in this. Philosophers, indeed, have

gone further, and denied to animals even the most moderate share of our own capacities, and have set them down as nothing better than machines. One is heartily glad to see the poor beasts getting their revenge in public opinion, and being recognised as our relations after having been almost repudiated as fellow-creatures. The distinctions, indeed, which have been drawn seem to us to rest upon no better foundation than a great many other metaphysical distinctions: that is, the assumption that because you can give two things different names, they must therefore have different natures. It is difficult to understand how anybody who has ever kept a dog, or seen an elephant, can have any doubts as to an animal's power of performing the essential processes of reasoning. We have been saying in thousands of treatises on logic, All men are mortal: Socrates is a man, therefore Socrates is mortal. The elephant reasons: All boys are bun-giving animals; that biped is a boy; therefore I will hold out my trunk to him. A philosopher says, The barometer is rising, and therefore we shall have fine weather; his dog says, My master is putting on his hat, and therefore I am going to have a walk. A dog equals a detective in the sharpness with which he infers general objectionableness from ragged clothes. A clever dog draws more refined inferences. If he is not up to enough simple arithmetic to count seven, he can at least say, Everybody is looking so gloomy, that it must be Sunday morning. If he is a sheep dog, he is probably more

capable of finding his way over hills than most members of the Alpine Club, and capable of combining his actions with a view to making the sheep—whose reasoning powers are limited—follow the right track. He can found judgments on cautious experiment, as anybody will admit who has seen a dog testing the strength of a plank which he has to cross, or measuring the height of a jump. In fact, a dog is constantly performing rudimentary acts of reason, which can only be distinguished from our own by the fact that he cannot put them into words. He can understand a few simple words; and though he cannot articulate, he can make sounds indicative of his wants and emotions, which are to words what the embryo is to the perfect organism. He cannot, it is true, make use of such sounds as *dā*, *sthā*, or *gā*, to signify give, stand, and sing. And here, exclaims a great philologist, is the finally impassable partition wall. With all respect for his authority, I cannot imagine that this grammatical dike is destined to hold back the deluge any better than its predecessors. What is the difference between *dā* and *bow-wow*? Simply, I presume, that the one indicates and the other does not indicate a certain power of framing abstract ideas. The language will follow as a natural result when intellectual power is developed; and the use of the words is merely noticeable as a symptom of the existence of the power. But we can discover the presence of intellect by other marks than the use of vocal signs. Granting that a dog cannot generalise sufficiently to say *dā*, no reasonable

observer can doubt that he has a rudimentary faculty of generalisation. There is not a dog in England too stupid to understand vaguely the simple word *sthā*, though there is not a dog in England who is clever enough to pronounce it. But capacity to understand is as good a proof of the presence of vocal intelligence, though in an inferior degree, as the capacity to speak. A dog frames a general concept of cats or sheep, and knows the corresponding words as well as a philologer. It is just as hopeless to attempt to prove by metaphysics that a gradual increase of intelligence would not generate a power of speaking in an animal as to prove the same in regard to a child of six months old. There is no *à priori* presumption, except the presumption against miraculous interference, against reasoning animals coming into existence by one process rather than another, and Kant and Hume must fight out their quarrel without the slightest reference to the series of actual phenomena.

The condemnation of the poor brutes as non-moral (if we may use such a word) seems to be still more monstrous. We need not speak of exceptional stories, such as the legend in a recent French newspaper of the sensitive dog who committed suicide when deserted by his friends; but who can doubt that his dog has something which serves as a very fair substitute for a sense of duty? Could anything be more like human heroism than the conduct of the poor collie who drove home her master's sheep, leaving her new-born puppies

by the side of the road? Or, to avoid particular instances, is there a barrister in England who can blush half so expressively as a dog found out in sharp practice—blushing, of course, being taken in a sense applicable to the dog's tail? Whether wild animals have such a sense of the value of any positive laws is more than we know; but wild animals, down to the lowest orders, show at least the maternal instinct. The devotion of beasts to their young belongs, one would say, to the highest order of moral beauty—except that it extends too low down amongst animated beings to please some people. Yet we may presume that the most hard-hearted of metaphysicians would find it hard to suppress an emotion of sympathy and approval at the sight of a bird overcoming its timidity to fight for its little puff-balls of children. It is a more pathetic if not a more sublime sight than Kant's eternally cited starry heavens. The metaphysical distinction between material and formal morality is as irrelevant as other such distinctions. Its meaning is simply that, though an animal may be capable of affection and self-sacrifice, it cannot construct the general formula that we ought to love our children. Certainly no beast has framed an abstract conception of duty. Neither, it is said, have some savages risen to that idea. But, given the emotion which has to be disciplined and the rudiments of the intellect which is to frame the formula, and there is no difficulty in supposing that general rules will be discovered as the

intellect is developed. We see in animals the germs of a sense of duty as of a sense of the beautiful, though they cannot talk about moral philosophy or æsthetics. The moral sense in its full development implies a faculty for observing consequences and stating general principles which the brute does not possess, but he has the rudiments both of the reason and the emotion, and what follows is a mere question of degree.

The argument, however, has another fatal weakness, if it is intended to raise a presumption against the possible passage from apehood to manhood. Assume, if you please, that the difference is as wide as possible. Suppose that reason and the moral sense are distinct from the rudimentary thoughts and passions that animate the feeble brute-brain not merely in degree but in kind. That will not raise any presumption that there must be a sudden gap in the chain of animated beings, unless you can prove that the new element, whatever it may be called, must enter, as it were, at one bound. If reason be radically different from instinct, yet reason may be present in some creatures in a merely rudimentary form. The question, indeed, does not admit of argument. We always have before our eyes a perfect and uninterrupted series. The child of six months old is less intelligent than a full-grown dog; and if we would imagine the development of man from monkey, we have only to suppose the first monkey to be the equal of an average baby (say) of one year old, the monkey's son to be equal to a baby of a year and

a day, and so on. We may thus proceed by perfectly imperceptible stages, and in the course of three or four thousand generations we shall get a man-monkey fully equal in intelligence to the average Hottentot. Thence upwards we cannot deny the possibility of development without heterodoxy. In short, by interpolating a sufficient number of terms we may form an ideal, which, for anything we can say, may be an actual, series ending with the man and beginning with the inferior animals, in which there shall not be a single violent transition. The question whether reason is or is not specifically distinct from instinct is simply irrelevant. In one case we must suppose that it begins by entering in homœopathic doses; in the other, that it is simply the development of certain lower faculties; in either case the animal will shade into the human intellect by degrees as imperceptible as those by which night changes into dawn.

The argument from the possibility of forming such a series has been ridiculed, but simply from a misappreciation of its bearing. The possibility does not, of course, prove the actual occurrence of the supposed evolution. But it meets completely the supposed *à priori* objection. The whole meaning of the metaphysical objection is that there is a gap, marked by the point at which a living being says *dā*, so wide that we cannot suppose it to have been traversed. The reply is that it can be traversed because we can point to the completion of a series many terms of which actually

exist, whilst the missing terms need only be supposed to follow the law already established. The ground is therefore left entirely free to the man of science to say whether or not such terms have in fact existed. The metaphysical argument is shown to be irrelevant; and the method of enquiry must be the ordinary method of scientific enquiry. In astronomy, metaphysicians tried to hamper the progress of investigation by the argument that a body could not act where it was not; and similarly, they try to meet evolutionists by arguing for the essential discontinuity of nature. The reply is that in both cases the *à priori* difficulty is not to the purpose and that we must simply appeal to experience. The question of the truth of Darwinism, like the question of the truth of Newton's discoveries, must be submitted to that test; and all attempts to exclude the appeal to facts by appealing to our intuitive knowledge must be suppressed. I am incompetent to pronounce any judgment upon the value of Mr. Darwin's doctrines. I am only trying to point out what is the tribunal which must ultimately decide the question. Kant has no more to say to the problem than Moses. Observation alone can determine a question of concrete fact; and whilst the decision is being considered, we may ask how far we are interested in the result.

It is here that we come upon the confusion already noticed. It results from mixing metaphysical enquiries about the what? with scientific enquiries into the how? A man of science says (possibly he makes a mistake,

but that is not to the purpose), Mix such and such elements under such and such conditions, and a living organism will make its appearance. The theologian sometimes meets this statement as if it were equivalent to an assertion that life is nothing but an arrangement of matter. The man of science has really said nothing of the kind: he does not know what is the essence of life or of matter; he has merely to do with the order in which phenomena occur; and has absolutely no concern with the occult substratum in which they are supposed to inhere. The utmost that he can ever say —if he can ever say so much—would come to this: Bring together a set of the phenomena which we call molecules and there will result a series of the phenomena which we call vital; but what molecules are, or what life is, is a question beyond his competence. Similarly, when he proceeds a step farther and traces the origin of our moral sense to some dumb instinct in the animal world, he is not really speaking treason against the dignity and importance of morality. Mr. Browning, in one of his poems, speaks of some contemptible French author who explained the origin of modesty by referring, as only a very free-speaking person could refer, to the mode in which the sexual instinct operated upon savage natures. If that Frenchman meant to infer that the modesty of a civilised being is no better than the semi-bestial instincts of a man-ape, he was as contemptible as the poet could wish, but he was also grossly illogical. His

observation merely went to show by what means one of the most essential of social instincts was originally generated in the world; and it is not the less essential because in its first origin it partook of the grossness of the animal in which it was implanted. Mr. MacLennan has written a very interesting book, tending to show that the original marriage ceremony was everywhere like that which survives in Australia to this day, where the wild human being knocks down his beloved with a club, and drags her off to his own den. Suppose this to be true, would it follow that marriage in the most refined and purest societies was no better than forcible abduction as practised in the Australian bush? Surely it would follow no more than the development of a man from a monkey would prove that men have still tails, or that the brain of a Newton is no better than that which directs a chimpanzee in its search for nuts. In short it is sufficiently plain that we do not diminish the value of any human accomplishments by tracing them back to their remote origin in the brute, or even the insect creation. That shudder which runs through us when we are invited to recognise our poor relations in the Regent's Park is gratuitous. The philosopher may have thrown more light upon the process by which we came to be what we are; but he does not, for he obviously cannot, argue that we are other than we are. Whether in pursuing our genealogy we stop short at 'who was the son of Adam' or carry it back through a vast series of links to 'who was the son of a monkey,'

the fact of our present existence, with our present instincts, aspirations and endowments, remains precisely what it was. The prospect, indeed, is improved for our remote descendants, 'far on in summers that we shall not see;' but for us poor creatures living and moving in this nineteenth century after Christ, the circumstances remain unaltered. Turn it as you will, we are the base from which the line is measured, and not the indeterminate point to be discovered by a process of trigonometry.

A vast amount of good indignation is thrown away from the neglect of these obvious distinctions. Philosophers, divines, and poets shrink with horror, or shrug their shoulders with sublime contempt, at the supposed materialism of Darwinists. They are simply slaying the slain; a process so pleasant that its popularity is not surprising. It is as easy as it is edifying to expose materialism, but, for practical purposes, you might as well confute the Gnostics or attack the doctrine that all things are made of water. Materialism, in the proper sense of the word, has died because it is too absurd a doctrine even for philosophers. As Comte says in regard to atheism and theology, it is the most illogical form of metaphysics. Modern men of science have abandoned it as completely as metaphysicians. If human knowledge be merely relative, and we are restrained by the law of our nature from penetrating to the absolute essences of things, it comes to much the same, whether we call everything matter or everything

spirit; for in each case, we only assert that everything is some unknowable X or Y. Materialism in its really degrading shape, as meaning the method of explaining the laws of mind by pure mechanics, and falling into confusion between the senses and the intellect, is not only an extinct doctrine, but is utterly irrelevant to Darwinism in any shape. And thus the tendency which is really attacked is not a legitimate consequence of Darwinism, but merely a complete misapprehension of his meaning which Mr. Darwin would doubtless be the first to denounce. It no doubt gives a man a complacent sense of superiority when he expresses his utter contempt for people who believe that men are mere lumps of matter, or that intellect is made of phosphates. Only it would be as well, if he would first tell us who were the people who held the obnoxious doctrine. To say that intellect is made of phosphates is not so much error as sheer nonsense. If it were discovered that the presence of phosphates in the brain were an essential condition of genius, there would be nothing really more degrading in the discovery than in the familiar fact that the presence of air in the lungs, or food in the stomach, is an essential condition of genius as of life. It is only by twisting the doctrine into a form in which no thinking man ever holds it, by forcing the man of science to become a metaphysician, in spite of his most energetic protests, and by interpreting what is said of phenomena as a statement about things in themselves, that a degrading turn can be given

to the theory so easily denounced. By all means let philosophers tear to pieces their conventional men of straw; they do some service by suppressing the gross popular misinterpretations of Mr. Darwin's theories, and call attention to the necessity of guarding against such inaccurate conceptions; but they have no right to impute such notions to the real supporters of the doctrine.

Is, then, the alarm which has been excited in men's minds totally unreasonable? In one sense it would seem to be so. The speculations of which we have been speaking are absolutely harmless to anyone who holds—as surely every sincere believer ought to hold—that religion depends upon certain instincts whose existence cannot be explained away by any possible account of the mode by which they came into existence. Property is not less sacred in the eyes of a reasonable man because it may have originated in mere physical force; nor religion because it first dawned upon mankind in the vague guesses of some torpid brain, which fancied that a bigger Caliban was moving the stars and rolling the thunder. But it may be true that the new theories will transform the mode in which men interpret the universe to themselves, and will therefore destroy some of the old formulæ which involved different perceptions. To those who have succeeded in persuading themselves that any set of Articles constructed some centuries ago were to be final and indestructible expressions of truth, the prospect may cer-

tainly be distressing. There may, indeed, be no positive logical irreconcilability between orthodoxy and Darwinism. A little more straining of a few phrases which have proved themselves to be sufficiently elastic, and the first obvious difficulty may be removed. The first chapter of Genesis has survived Sir Charles Lyell; it may be stretched sufficiently to include Mr. Darwin. But in questions of this kind there is a kind of logical instinct which outruns the immediate application of the new theories. The mere change of perspective does much. When the sun was finally placed in the centre of the heavens instead of the earth, the few texts which apparently opposed were easily adapted to the new theories. But there was a further change of infinitely greater importance, which, though not so easily embodied in direct logical issues, profoundly modified all theological conceptions. When people began to realise the fact that we live in a wretched little atom of a planet dancing about the sun, instead of being the whole universe, with a few stars to save candlelight, the ancient orthodoxy was shaken to its base. It is impossible to read the controversies which marked the great intellectual revolt of the last two centuries without seeing how much men's minds were influenced by the simple consideration that Christians were a small numerical minority of the human race, and the habitation of the race a mere grain of dust in the universe. The recognition of these two facts, that there were millions of heathens, and that the universe

was a very large place, really upset the old theology. The facts, indeed, were more or less known before, and were not capable of furnishing syllogisms absolutely incompatible with any orthodox dogma. And yet the mere change in the point of view, working rather upon the imagination than the reason, gradually made the old positions untenable. A similar change is being brought about by the application of that method of which Darwinism is at present the most conspicuous example. Possibly the change may be of even greater importance. Certainly it is of far too great importance to be more than dimly indicated here. Briefly it may be described as the substitution of a belief in gradual evolution for a belief in spasmodic action and occasional outbursts of creative energy; of the acceptance of the corollary that we must seek for the explanation of facts or ideas by tracing their history instead of accounting for them by some short *à priori* method; and thus of the adoption of the historical method in all manner of investigations into social, and political, and religious problems which were formerly solved by a much more summary, if not more satisfactory method.

It is curious to remark how the influence of new methods penetrates the minds of those who would most strenuously repudiate some of the results to which they lead. We may illustrate the point by an analogy drawn from the theory of which we have been speaking. Mr. Wallace has described what he calls protective

resemblances. A butterfly which precisely suits the palates of certain birds would be speedily exterminated if it were not for an ingenious device. It cleverly passes itself off under false colours by imitating the external shape of some other butterfly, which the bird considers as disgusting. So oysters, if they were quick enough, might evade the onslaught of human appetites by taking the external resemblance of periwinkles. A very similar variety of protective resemblance may be detected in the history of opinions. The old-fashioned doctrine remains essentially the same, but it changes its phraseology so as to look exactly like its intrusive rival. We have already given an instance. It is permissible, it appears, for orthodox Catholics to hold that the series of facts alleged by Mr. Darwin actually occurred, and that the ape changed by slow degrees into the man; only they must save themselves by calling the process miraculous, and thus, for a time at least, the old theory may be preserved. Perhaps it will strike people in the course of years, that if all the phenomena conform to the law established by philosophers, it is rather absurd to say that they do not conform in virtue of the law, but in virtue of a specific interference of Divine power. Still the ingenuity of the artifice is obvious, and it affords an instructive example of the method of reconciling old things and new. In the same way, the theological doctrine of development mimics the historical accounts of the process by which opinions have actually been formed.

Just as the sceptic rashly fancies that he has brought matters to a conclusive issue, the theologian evades his grasp by putting on the external form of the very doctrines which he has been opposing.

Thus, for example, Dr. Newman argues in the 'Grammar of Assent' for the doctrine of the Atonement, on the ground (amongst others) that a similar belief is found to exist in all barbarous nations. It may seem strange, he goes on to say, that he should take his ideas of natural religion from the initial and not from the final stage of human development. His 'answer is obvious' (all these ingenious manipulations of argument are only too obvious), and it comes shortly to this—that our 'so-called civilisation' is a one-sided development of man's nature, favouring the intellect, but ignoring the conscience; and that therefore it is 'no wonder that the religion in which it issues has no sympathy with the hopes and fears of the awakened soul, or with those frightful presentiments which are expressed in the worship and the traditions of the heathen.' In simpler times the resemblances between the heathen and the orthodox religion would have been indignantly denied, or regarded as diabolic parodies. Now the Catholic divine is as ready as the philosopher to trace out the analogy, though he puts a different interpretation upon it. The philosopher, that is, regards the Catholic religion as preserving the remains of older forms of thought which are gradually expiring under the influence of free enquiry. The divine accepts just the

same facts, but he regards the old barbarous superstition as a dim reflection of revealed truths, whilst a satisfactory reason is found for putting the civilised intellect out of court altogether. The verdict of the stupid, ferocious savage, who makes an idol out of a bit of wood and a red rag, and then pacifies its spite by slaughtering fowls or prisoners in its honour, is declared to be superior to that of the modern philosopher; who, it is true, has a scruple or two not known to the savage, but whose conscience has not been properly developed. Sometimes, indeed, it has been developed so awkwardly as to revolt against theological dogmas. This, however, is beside the point. It is clear that modern tendencies have penetrated into the hostile camp. It is the much-abused philosopher who has taught us to take a new interest in the lower religions of the world, instead of summarily rejecting them as the work of devils. The mere fact that we have risen to such a conception as that of a comparative study of religion is certainly not sufficient by itself to confute the pretensions of what claims to be an exclusive revelation. It is possible to adapt the old to the new beliefs by the methods of which Dr. Newman's argument is a daring example. After Mr. Darwin and his followers have traced out the resemblance between men and monkeys with the utmost possible clearness, it is always possible for a dogmatist to discover some good reason why the transition should have required a miraculous inter-

vention. In the same way, the analogies which the philosopher may discover between the various religions of the world will never convince him that his own special creed is not of supernatural origin, though the others which resemble it so strangely are traceable to the spontaneous working of the human intellect. A very little dexterity is required to raise the resemblance to that point at which it becomes an argument for the reasonableness of the supposed revelation, and is yet no argument against its supernatural character. Admit your naked savage to prove that man has a need for the belief in Atonement, but do not let him be produced as evidence that the belief finds its most congenial element and grows to the largest dimensions in a debased and torpid intellect. By such logical manipulation as this, the accumulation of uncomfortable facts may long be rendered harmless. It all depends upon the way in which you look at things. The acute thinkers who have helped to elaborate any ancient system of thought have always provided a proper set of pigeon-holes in which inconvenient facts may be stowed away. It is long before the facts become weighty enough to break down the framework. But no agent is so powerful in bringing about the change as the subtle and penetrating influence of a new method. It may not follow logically that because catastrophes have been banished from geology, and the series of animated beings has been proved to be

continuous, therefore the same conceptions should be applied to the religious beliefs of mankind. And yet nobody can doubt that in practice the influence would be unmistakeable. The burden of proof would be shifted, and that in itself makes an amazing difference. The popular belief has hitherto been that, unless you could prove the contrary, it would be reasonable to suppose that the transition from monkey to man involved a sudden leap. If it came to be the popular belief that, unless you could prove the contrary, men must be supposed to have developed out of monkeys by the forces now at work, the imagination would outrun the reason. It would be assumed that a religion was the growth of that stage of development at which the human intellect had arrived, and not the work of a series of sudden interferences. Christianity would be a phenomenon to be studied like others by the investigation of the conditions under which it arose, and the advocates of a theory of supernatural intervention would have to encounter a set of established beliefs instead of finding them in their favour. This is the imperceptible intellectual influence which gradually permeates and transforms the prevalent conceptions by a process which is as irresistible as it is difficult to define by accurate formulæ. Religious instincts, we rightly say, are indestructible; but the forms in which they may be embodied are indefinitely variable, and no one can say how fast and how far the influence of a change worked in one department of thought may

gradually spread by a silent contagion to others apparently removed from it.

Thus, admitting to the fullest extent that Darwinism not only does not threaten, but does not even tend to threaten, the really valuable elements of our religious opinions, it is quite consistent to maintain that it may change the conceptions in which they are at present embodied to an extent to which it is impossible to assign any limits. Darwinism, for example, does not, it may be said, make it more difficult to believe in a God. On the contrary, it may be fairly urged that a theory which tends to bring order out of chaos, and to reveal some general scheme working throughout all time and space, renders it more easy to maintain such rational theism as is now possible. It helps us to form some dim guess as to whence we come and whither we are going, though the guess is of a different kind from theological conjectures. And yet we must admit, to be frank, that 'belief in God' is a phrase covering so many radically different states of mind, that a categorical yes or no can hardly be given to the question. At the present day it is too often used to mean disbelief in man. It connotes, at least, the opinion that reason is a delusion, and progress a sham. But if, in a more philosophical sense, belief in God means belief in a 'general stream of tendency,' Darwinism, so far from weakening that belief, helps us to map out some small part of the stream, though its source and its end be hidden in impenetrable mystery. On the

other hand, Darwinism is clearly opposed to the more popular conceptions of theology. It is incompatible with that theory of the universe to which we owe Paley's almighty watchmaker. Paley, indeed, was more or less aware of this scientific difficulty, and gave some answer to its earlier form, though he was utterly blind to the metaphysical difficulties. For Darwinism is, in fact, the scientific embodiment of that attack upon final causes which was already explicitly set forth by Spinoza, and which animated some of Hume's keenest logic. The eye and the ear are no longer to be regarded as illustrating the cunning workmanship of the Divine artificer, but as particular results of the uniform operation of what are called the laws of nature. Instead of saying, He that made the eye, shall he not see? we confine ourselves to remarking that the development of eyes is part of the great process of the adaptation of the organism to its medium. In attacking this popular theology, with its inevitable anthropomorphism, Darwinism, it may be said, merely destroys the conceptions which have been abandoned by the most philosophical theists. The 'God intoxicated' Spinoza was as hostile to them as the most abandoned materialists. The question still remains which has always agitated the keenest speculators. The man of science refuses to see anything beyond the operation of invariable laws, whilst the theologian still urges that the laws imply a lawgiver, though forced to abandon the anthropomorphic conception of the

Supreme Being. The all-wise and all-good ruler of the universe is hidden from our sight by an impenetrable veil, his wisdom and his goodness are not like ours, and his modes of operation transcend our narrow powers of thought. God is not an external ruler, a part of the series of phenomena, but in some mysterious way an all-pervading essence. It is often said, and I believe truly, that if you persist in following the theological argument to its legitimate conclusion, and refuse to blind your eyes by using the word 'mystery' where you ought to say 'nonsense,' you cannot stop short of Spinozism, or, in other words, of identifying God with the universe. With such a theism, which may be called the most exalted form of theism, Darwinism is perfectly compatible. Whether God, so considered, be a fitting object of our love and reverence, or too vague an object to attract human emotion, is undoubtedly a most important question, and it is one to which Darwinism has no direct relation. The difficulties which Darwinism opposes to the less philosophical doctrine are merely correlative to those which hamper any theory which first assumes an infinite and omnipotent being, and then tries to set limits to his action and his power. The doctrine of final causes, in fact, implies contrivance, and therefore a limitation of the divine energy, by conditions imposed from without; and thus in refusing to recognise an adaptation of means to ends, comprehensible to man, in the progressive changes of an organism, Darwin is at one with Spinoza.

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There is, however, another doctrine which is supposed to be more nearly affected; and probably, though we seldom give open expression to our fears, it is this tendency which is really the animating cause of the alarm which is obviously felt. Does not the new theory make it difficult to believe in immortal souls? If we admit that the difference between men and monkeys is merely a difference of degree, can we continue to hold that monkeys will disappear at their death like a bubble, and that men will rise from their ashes? So vast a difference in the ultimate fate and the intrinsic nature of the two links should surely correspond to a wide gap in the chain. We are too proud to admit a gorilla or a chimpanzee to a future world, and yet, if they are only lower forms of humanity, we do not quite see our way to exclude them. The difficulty in one shape or another has long been felt. 'Nobody thinks,' says Voltaire, 'of giving an immortal soul to a flea; why should you give one any the more to an elephant, or a monkey, or my Champagne valet, or a village steward, who has a trifle more instinct than my valet?' The difficulty of drawing the line is enhanced to the imagination when we assume that the flea is the remote ancestor of the village steward, and believe that one has melted by imperceptible degrees into the other. The orthodox may be excused for trembling when they see that central article of their faith assailed, and are in danger of being deprived of the great consolations of their

religion—Heaven and hell. This much may certainly be said for their comfort: Whatever reasons may be drawn from our consciousness for the belief that man is not merely a cunning bit of chemistry—a product of so much oxygen, hydrogen, and carbon—must remain in full force. We may doubt how far the belief ever rested on metaphysical arguments, and, indeed, it seems to be the orthodox opinion that it must be accepted on the strength of revelation. It would therefore only be affected so far as Darwinism and the methods to which it gives rise tend to explain the origin and growth of a faith to which all believers cling so fondly. And, whatever the result may be, it is at least natural to suppose that it would rather tend to modify than to destroy the belief, to set bounds to the dogmatic confidence with which we have ventured to define the nature of the soul, than to uproot our belief in its existence. After all, it would not be a very terrible result if we should be driven to the conclusion that some kind of rudimentary soul may be found even in the lower animals. The 'Spectator,' which, in spite of its tremulous flirtations with the infidel, is a reasonably orthodox journal, has lately been asking whether we have any excuse for refusing immortality to well-conducted cats, or to that admirable and fortunately authentic dog which watched for ten years upon its master's grave. Poor beast! we should be willing to hope that he has found admission to the equal sky; but without jesting on so awful a subject, or venturing

into mysteries where the boldest metaphysician walks with uncertain tread, there is so far no obvious reason why our new conceptions of the facts—assuming that they establish themselves—should not be accommodated to the old belief. The purely metaphysical argument, whatever its value, and I admit that the value does not seem to be very great, remains untouched.

There is, however, one other thing to be said, and it may as well be said plainly. After all, why is the belief in a personal immortality supposed to be so essential to the happiness of mankind? It is not because we, as virtuous people, think it necessary that a place should be provided where the virtuous may receive an interminable pension for their good deeds, and the bad be tormented to the end of time. Some people, it is true, still ask for a kind of penal settlement in another world, in order to save our police rates in this. But that doctrine, both from its faults and its merits is fast expiring. It is too far intelligible and downright for our squeamish digestions, as it must be confessed that its tendency is not invariably elevating. It may convert religion into a specially clever form of selfishness, and take the grace out of the Christian character. The persons who call themselves Spiritualists in the present day sometimes claim to be providing an excellent substitute for our old superstitions. They really show how a belief in another life may be twisted into the service of a most grovelling form of materialism. Revolting as the old beliefs in hell may appear to be, they may

also be cited for another purpose. Men are virtuous, it is sometimes said, because they believe in hell. Is not this an inversion of the proper order of thought? Should we not rather say that men have believed in hell because they were virtuous? There has been so general a belief that vice was degrading, and was to be discouraged by the strongest possible motives, that even the semi-barbarous part of mankind have exhausted their fancy in devising the most elaborate torments to express the horror with which they regarded it. It is painful to dwell upon the pictures of hideous anguish which the perturbed imaginations of past generations have conjured up and regarded as the penalties which the merciful Creator had in store for imperfect creatures placed in a state where their imperfections could not fail to lead them into error; but there is this much of comfort about it, that at least those ghastly images were the reflections of the horror with which all that was best in them revolted against moral evil. It is needless to say how easily those conceptions might be turned to the worst purposes, and religion itself be made an instrument not only for restraining the intellects, but for lowering the consciences of mankind. For our present purpose, it is enough to remark that a similar reflection may convince us that, whatever changes of opinion may be in store for us, we need not fear that any scientific conclusions can permanently lower our views of man's duty here. The belief in immortality, diffused throughout the world, is not, more than any

other belief, valuable simply on its own account. It is valuable in so far as it has enabled men to rise above the selfishness and the sensuality which otherwise threatened to choke the higher impulses of our nature. But it was the existence of those impulses which gave it its strength, and not any of the metaphysical arguments which can only appeal to a very few exceptional minds.

The ordinary argument upon this point seems to overlook a very obvious consideration. Excellent persons cling to the sanctions of another world as the only safeguard of morality. Their doctrine might be perfectly sound if those sanctions came from without, or were discovered by a process of reasoning. If it were a historical fact that the Almighty had proclaimed from Sinai the existence of heaven and hell, and that such a proclamation had been the cause of the belief, we might hold that men had been frightened into virtue by external means. Or if, again, we supposed that savages had read Butler's 'Analogy,' and had been convinced by his arguments that this world was a state of probation, we might infer that the fear of hell was the cause of morality. But once assume that the belief has been spontaneously generated from within and the whole argument disappears. Give up supernatural interference, and man must be credited with the possession of virtuous instincts which gave the colouring to his theology. If our nature is essentially corrupt, it is consistent to believe that the scourge of

hell-fire alone keeps us in order; but if man is not only the sufferer, but the inventor and wielder of the scourge, we must give up the dogma of corruption. If anyone chooses to say, I would sin but for my fear of hell, there is no arguing with him personally; but, accepting the scientific view, and therefore interrogating experience for what men have actually done, instead of interrogating our inner consciousness to find out what they should consistently do, we inevitably accept the conclusion that the virtuous instincts are the foundation, not the outgrowth, of the belief, and may therefore be expected to survive its destruction or transformation.

The ordinary remark is that such arguments apply only to the intelligent part of mankind, and that the brute multitude requires the coarse old stimulants. If by this it is meant that at certain stages of civilisation the belief is natural and necessary, nobody would think of denying it. It is merely saying that a belief so widely diffused is inevitable under certain conditions. If it is meant to imply that, in all times and under all circumstances, men must be kept in order by the threats of supernatural vengeance which awed the infancy of the race, the doctrine appears to me to be at once unscientific and immoral. It is immoral because in one shape or another it comes to saying that we must lie to maintain virtue, that we must profess ourselves convinced of a theory which cannot be proved in order to deceive the ignorant masses. It is unscientific because it is contradicted by facts. Was

not the Jewish religion stamped into the fibre of the toughest of races without any definite reference to another world? Do we not find every day that the sanction of public opinion is so powerful as to enforce many practices in the very teeth of the supernatural sanctions? So far from hell supplying the most powerful of motives, we may say, as Bacon said of the fear of death, that there is no motive which is not able to overcome it. Why then should it be represented as affording the only leverage capable of making men virtuous? If, indeed, Darwinism is interpreted as simply striking out one fragment of the popular creed and leaving the rest standing, the argument may be granted. Expunge all reference to hell from Christianity and the mutilated system may be inefficacious. But transform the whole theory consistently, and what is lost in one direction may be gained in another; and the beliefs to which we owe the sanctions of another world are malleable enough to take many different forms.

Religions thrive by a kind of natural selection; those which provide expression for our deepest feelings crush out their rivals, not those which are inferred by a process of abstract reasoning. To be permanent, they must bear the test of reason; but they do not owe to it their capacity for attracting the hearts of men. The inference, therefore, from the universality of any creed is not that it is true, for that would prove Buddhism or Mahommedanism as well as Chris-

tianity; but that it satisfies more or less completely the spiritual needs of its believers. And, therefore, we may be certain that, if the various tendencies which we have summed up in the name of Darwinism should ultimately become triumphant, they must find some means, though it is given to nobody as yet to define them, of reconciling those instincts of which the belief in immortality was a product. The form may change —we cannot say how widely—but the essence, as every progress in the scientific study of religions goes to show, must be indestructible. When a new doctrine cuts away some of our old dogmas, we fancy that it must destroy the vital beliefs to which they served as scaffolding. Doubtless it has that effect for a time in those minds with whom the association has become indissoluble. That is the penalty we pay for progress. But we may be sure that it will not take root till in some shape or other it has provided the necessary envelopes for the deepest instincts of our nature. If Darwinism demonstrates that men have been evolved out of brutes, the religion which takes it into account will also have to help men to bear in mind that they are now different from brutes.

CHAPTER IV.

ARE WE CHRISTIANS?

ARE we still Christians? is the question recently propounded by Strauss. The answer which he gives has startled Mr. Gladstone into a pathetic appeal to the schoolboys of Liverpool. The Premier advises the youth of England to rest content with the decisions pronounced some centuries ago by the Council of Nice. The advice is amiable, if perhaps a little singular from the leader of the party of progress, and let us hope that it will bring peace to the schoolboy mind. Regarded from the point of view of pure logic, such a reply can scarcely be considered effective as against Strauss and modern criticism. Strauss, indeed, is not writing for schoolboys. The 'we' of whom he speaks belong to the class—a class, he adds, no longer to be counted by thousands—to whom the old faith and the old Church can no longer offer a weatherproof refuge. The majority even of this class would be content to lop off the decayed bough, trusting that there is yet vital power in the trunk. But there is a minority, and it is in their name that Strauss speaks, who think that,

in giving up the old supernaturalism, they must also take final leave of the worship to which it alone could give enduring power over the souls of men. Taking the 'we' in this limited sense, there can be but one answer to the question. That answer is given by Strauss in the most unequivocal terms, and at times with some unnecessary asperity. Passing in review the most essential articles of the Christian creed, and the practices founded upon them, Strauss declares that for 'us' they can have no meaning. The attempts to effect a compromise between Christianity and Rationalism are nothing but a lamentable waste of human ingenuity. And thus he replies to his own question: emphatically, no. To be a Christian, a modern thinker must be dull or dishonest; he must palter with his own convictions, or with the world. 'We,' if we would be true to ourselves or to mankind, must abandon our ancient dwelling-place. Let us shake the dust off our feet, and taking reason for our guide, and Mr. Darwin for the best modern expounder of the universe, go boldly forwards to whatever may be in store for us.

That such a question should be so put, and so answered, is clearly a noteworthy phenomenon even to men who are not perorating to schoolboys. That Strauss speaks in the name of a numerous and an intellectually powerful class is undeniable. Whether, in fact, a love of truth bids us abandon all those beliefs which alone rendered the world beautiful or even tolerable to the good and to the wise of former generations,

is one of the most important questions that can be asked, and one, it need not be said, infinitely too wide to be considered here. Another analogous question is suggested by Strauss's inquiry. What of the vast 'we' who lie outside the little band of true believers; the 'we' upon whom the sun of science has not arisen, and who lie in the dim twilight, or even in the tenfold shades of night cast by the ancient superstitions not yet dispersed by its rays? It is long, as Mr. Tennyson tells, before the morning

> 'creeping down,
> Flood with full daylight glebe and town.'

The mountain-tops may be glowing, but centuries may pass before the valleys partake of that brilliant illumination. The ordinary phrases about the development of thought refer only to a select few. It is but a numerically insignificant minority which has broken the old chains, and seen through the old fallacies. The emancipation of masses at the other extremity of the social scale, if it is to be called emancipation, is of a purely negative character. The thinking class is analogous to the brain of Hobbes's Leviathan; but the analogy must be made to fit, by assuming that Leviathan resembles some monstrous whale, in whom the propagation of impulses from the brain to the extremities takes a perceptible time, and whose organisation includes a number of subsidiary ganglia which can imperfectly discharge the cerebral functions. When a living idea no longer dominates the brain, the ex-

tremities are the first to feel the loss of its vital power. The intermediate parts of the body continue to work in the old fashion by a sort of blind spontaneity which yet lingers in the secondary organs. When a Church loses its hold on the intellectual classes, it can no longer maintain its sway over the 'proletariate;' but the great bulk of the nation continues to think or to fancy it thinks in the old formulæ, though conscious that a strange numbness is creeping over its faculties. What, then, is the state of mind of that great bulk of Englishmen who have neither listened to Strauss nor to Mr. Bradlaugh; who have neither positively revolted nor unconsciously fallen away; whose intellects are not active enough to care for scientific impulse, and yet too active to be content with a pure absence of ideas? Assuming for the moment that Strauss speaks truly as to his own 'we,' what of the next of the concentric social circles?

As the new doctrines filter downwards, they exercise a strange and, it almost seems, a capricious effect upon the lower strata of belief. Here and there old creeds are dissolved, leaving incoherent fragments behind them. Sometimes the destruction of later incrustations of doctrines only brings to light ancient forms of superstition, which we supposed to have vanished long ago from the world. The ancient gods of the heathen survived, as we know, to become the devils of Christian nations. Beliefs, instead of being abandoned, are transformed, and adapt themselves by slight modifica-

tions to the new atmosphere. Half understood fragments of the new theories work strange havoc with the older systems of thought. Ignorant people, it may be, see only the destructive side of rationalist teaching, and with their belief in the old sanctions lose their belief in the permanence of all morality. Or, taking fright at the prospect before them, they plunge back into the ancient superstitions. Or, catching at the scientific jargon, they dress up new idols, whose worship, in some cases, is not less degrading than that of their predecessors. And thus we have a blundering system of chaotic beliefs, of which it is difficult to render any coherent account, or to detect the animating principle. Strauss we know, and Dr. Newman we know; but what of all these singular phantoms which are moving, and to all appearance living, in the world? Which doctrines are mere shadowy ghosts, and which have some solid core of genuine belief? When a man boasts of his implicit faith, is he really avowing utter scepticism or profound conviction? The old method of arguing from creeds to genuine beliefs, from what men say to what they think, has become a mere byeword. Were it applicable we should have to suppose that some people still believe the Athanasian Creed. If we could conceive the old formulæ to be suddenly blotted out of existence, and men to endeavour to express their creeds in the simplest words that occurred to them, we should have a strange substitute for the Thirty-nine Articles. Cross-examine the simple-minded believer, and you

will find him quite unconsciously avowing the most startling heresies. In spite of the rash assertions of metaphysicians, mutually contradictory propositions lie side by side in his mind in perfect harmony. Perhaps he will seldom assert blankly that A is at once B and not B; but if those statements be a little disguised, he will produce them alternately, or even simultaneously, with the utmost complacency. He has no trouble in holding the premisses of a syllogism, and denying its conclusion; and still less in asserting a general proposition whilst denying every particular statement that it includes. What—to take an obvious example—is commoner than to find a zealot who vigorously asserts a belief in hell, and is yet shocked at the opinion that anybody will be damned? A place of eternal torture eternally untenanted seems to be no very useful article of faith, and yet it is perhaps the nearest expression of the ordinary opinion on the subject. The statement, indeed, must be made with diffidence, for to discover by any direct inquiry what people really think on that most tremendous subject is one of the most hopeless of tasks.

Indeed it may be said, with little exaggeration, not only that there is no article in the creeds which may not be contradicted with impunity, but that there is none which may not be contradicted in a sermon calculated to win the reputation of orthodoxy, and be regarded as a judicious bid for a bishopric. The popular state of mind seems to be typified in the well-known

anecdote of the cautious churchwarden, who, whilst commending the general tendency of his incumbent's sermon, felt bound to hazard a protest upon one point. 'You see, sir,' as he apologetically explained, 'I think there be a God.' He thought it an error of taste, or perhaps of judgment, to hint a doubt as to the first article of the creed. Undoubtedly, any one who should say in plain terms 'I am an Atheist,' would be in danger, not indeed of persecution, but of some social inconvenience. He would be wanting in good manners, though not a criminal. For is it not a wanton insult to our neighbours to contradict their harmless prejudices, when we can so easily reduce them to a mere verbal difference? What else is the good of metaphysics? Is it not the art of identifying 'is' and 'is not,' and of repelling the profane vulgar by the terrors of a mysterious jargon, whilst you propound what views you please to esoteric disciples? May you not say, in language strong enough to satisfy a Positivist, that the human mind can form no conception of Divinity; that good and merciful, applied to the Almighty, mean no more than wrathful and jealous, or even than epithets implying corporeal attributes, and say it all amidst general applause so long as your assault is ostensibly directed against the presumptuous Deist, and not against Moses or St. Paul? A grateful clergy will applaud you for wielding weapons so unfamiliar to them, and so steadily associated with the adversary, and will take your word for it that you mean well. To repudiate

Christianity in express terms would, of course, be inadmissible for a sound divine; but dexterously soften away the old doctrines, explain that there is a divine element in all men as well as in Christ, interpret the true meaning of his mission upon earth, and the means of salvation for fallen man in terms of modern philosophy instead of the old theological phraseology, and nothing is easier than to show, and to win the credit of a pious motive for showing, that the one central event round which, as old believers thought, the whole universe revolved, is nothing but an ancient legend, more touching perhaps, but not more vitally important to human beings, than the death of Socrates.

But why insist on facts so notorious? Do not all sections of Churchmen lament or exult over the marvellous elasticity of the ancient formulæ? In truth, shifts of this kind are scarcely adapted for the vulgar. They belong rather to the outward circle of Strauss's 'we;' to those who live in the penumbra, not in the outer darkness; who fancy that they can allow the decayed branches to fall of themselves, without laying the axe to the root of the tree. Plainer minds are perplexed by such manifestations, and cannot put up with a creed where, for the old formula, 'I believe,' they are requested to read, 'I am on the whole inclined to believe,' or to say more positively, 'I firmly believe in a general stream of tendency.' They want some more tangible grip of substantial realities, not these shadowy phantoms of opinion, changeable and bodiless

as a morning mist. To discover the belief of the half-educated, which includes ninety-nine in a hundred of the so-called educated classes, we must not look to sermons—if, indeed, sermons reveal to us anybody's belief, and not rather blind gropings after something that will serve as a stop-gap for belief. Even those popular preachings which are modelled to suit the popular taste, fail to give us any very trustworthy indications. They are sometimes seasoned more highly to suit a decaying palate. Shall we look then to those popular platitudes which bring down the applauses of crowded audiences, and sell cheap newspapers by the hundred thousand? From them we may learn, for example, that the British workman will not have the Bible excluded from his schools, and will not have the Sunday desecrated. Certainly these are two of the most definite points in the popular creed. Our reverence for the Bible is, as Dr. Newman tells us, the strong point of Protestantism; and our observance of Sunday is the one fact which tells a foreigner that we have a religious faith. No one, whatever his opinions, should undervalue those beliefs, or, if they must so be called, superstitions. An English Sunday, with all its gloom and with all its drunkenness, is a proof that we do in fact worship something besides our stomachs. Familiarity with the Bible, slavish and dull as is our reverence for the letter, affords almost the only means by which the imagination of the people is cultivated, and some dim perception maintained of a

divine meaning in the universe. But then these two sentiments do not make a creed. Sunday is cherished by those who never enter a church, and the Bible may be a symbol of every creed that has existed in Europe for eighteen hundred years. Inquiring a little further, we probably come upon the statement that the people of England believe in unsectarian Christianity. There is a whole armoury of popular platitudes used to stimulate our enthusiasm in this noble cause. Platforms ring with its praises, and articles are published about it on Good Friday, which, if sincere—as we must hope they are—should have melted their authors to tears.

If we brutally put such statements to the torture, and persist in crushing them in a logical mill, they can have but one meaning. They simply amount to scepticism in a gushing instead of a cynical form. Unsectarian Christianity can no more exist than there can be a triangle which is neither scalene nor isosceles nor equilateral. All Christians might conceivably be converted to one sect; but if you strip off from the common creed all the matters which are in dispute between them, the residuum is at most the old-fashioned deism, if, indeed, it amounts to that. Nor is this mere logic-chopping. The more we look into the question, the plainer is the answer. Christianity, as it is understood by ultramontanes or by ultra-Protestants, implies a body of beliefs of unspeakable importance to the world. They may be true or they may be false, but they

cannot be set aside as perfectly indifferent. Man is or is not placed here for a brief interval, which is to decide his happiness or his misery throughout all eternity. His situation does or does not depend upon his allegiance to the Church, or upon his undergoing a certain spiritual change. Christ came or did not come from God, and died or did not die to reconcile man to his Maker. An infidel is a man who accepts the negative of those propositions; a Christian is one who takes the affirmative; an unsectarian Christian, if he has any belief at all, is one who says that they may or may not be true, and that it does not much matter. If that is a roundabout way of expressing agreement with the infidel, the statement is intelligible, though its sincerity is questionable. But, taking it literally, it is surely the most incredible of all the assertions that a human being can possibly put forward. Can it possibly be a matter of indifference whether or not hell is gaping for me, and heaven opening its doors? whether or not there is only one means provided by my Creator of escape from the dangers that environ us, and whether or not I avail myself of them? Dogmas, you say, matter nothing; charity and purity are everything. But to say that such dogmas matter nothing is to imply that they are not true; for the only alternative is the blasphemous proposition that God Almighty sent His Son upon earth to proclaim to His creatures the awful realities of their position; to tell them how to escape His wrath and how to do His

will; and that, for all practical purposes, He might as well have let it alone. The dogmas are true, or they are immoral; for they tend to alter radically our whole conception of the world and of our position in it. They give us the chart by which to direct our course over the mysterious ocean to the unknown shore. It cannot be a matter of indifference whether the dangers which they indicate, and the harbour to which they would direct us, have or have not a real existence.

It is out of place, it may be urged, to apply serious reasoning to such vague aspirations. Rather let us admit that, flimsy as is the popular rhetoric, disgusting to all who ask for grain instead of chaff as is the unctuous sentimentalism in which it wraps itself, it contains a sort of meaning not devoid of value. By Christianity, in such phrases, is chiefly meant, so far as can be guessed, a few maxims from the Sermon on the Mount. The sturdy old Scotchwoman who complained of the 'cauld morality' of that document, had still a theology; but her sentiments are thoroughly out of fashion. The ordinary mind is rather shocked than otherwise by the statement that our faith means anything more than a command to do to others as we would that they should do to us; accompanied by a belief that the character of Christ is a perfect embodiment of the virtues of benevolence and humility. The creed is a simple one, and not a bad one as far as it goes. Some exceptions might be taken to the type of character

which it is calculated to develope. People who use the phrase have a peculiar Manichæism of their own. The evil principle is represented by Malthus, working by the 'inexorable laws' of supply and demand; and the good principle by spasmodic outbursts of 'genial' sentimentalism. At one moment the poor are to be improved by allowing them to starve; at another, by giving them plenty of plum-pudding and milk-punch at Christmas. But, be this as it may, the doctrine, turn it how you will, is essentially sceptical. It is Strauss translated into the popular tongue; for it amounts to saying that the doctrines which were the very life-blood of the old creeds which once stirred men's hearts to flame, are to be respectfully and civilly shelved, and that morality can do very well without them. It is the product of intellectual indolence, though not of actual intellectual revolt. We have not the courage to say that the Christian doctrines are false, but we are lazy enough to treat them as irrelevant. We shut our eyes to the Christian theory of the universe, and fix them exclusively upon those moral precepts which are admittedly common to Buddhists and Mahomedans, to Stoics and to Positivists, though, it may be, most forcibly expressed by Christians. To proclaim unsectarian Christianity is, in circuitous language, to proclaim that Christianity is dead. The love of Christ, as representing the ideal perfection of human nature, may indeed be still a powerful motive, and powerful whatever the view which we take of

Christ's character. The advocates of the doctrine in its more intellectual form represent this passion as the true essence of Christianity. They assert with obvious sincerity of conviction that it is the leverage by which alone the world can be moved. But, as they would themselves admit, this conception would be preposterous if, with Strauss, we regarded Christ as a mere human being. Our regard for Him might differ in degree, but would not differ in kind, from our regard for Socrates or for Pascal. It would be impossible to consider it as an overmastering and all-powerful influence. The old dilemma would be inevitable; he that loves not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love Christ whom he hath not seen? A mind untouched by the agonies and wrongs which invest London hospitals and lanes with horror, could not be moved by the sufferings of a single individual, however holy, who died eighteen centuries ago. No! the essence of the belief is the belief in the divinity of Christ. But accept that belief; think for a moment of all that it implies; and you must admit that your Christianity becomes dogmatic in the highest degree. Our conception of the world and its meaning are more radically changed than our conceptions of the material universe when the sun instead of the earth became its centre. Every view of history, every theory of our duty, must be radically transformed by contact with that stupendous mystery. Whether you accept or reject the special tenets of the Athanasian Creed is an

infinitesimal trifle. You are bound to assume that every religion which does not take this dogma into account is without true vital force. Infidels, heathens, and Unitarians reject the single influence which alone can mould our lives in conformity with the everlasting laws of the universe. Of course, there are tricks of logical sleight of hand by which the conclusion is evaded. It would be too long and too trifling to attempt to expose them. Unsectarian Christianity consists in shirking the difficulty without meeting it, and trying hard to believe that the passion can survive without its essential basis. It proclaims the love of Christ as our motive, whilst it declines to make up its mind whether Christ was God or man; or endeavours to escape a categorical answer under a cloud of unsubstantial rhetoric. But the difference between man and God is infinite; and no effusion of superlatives will disguise the plain fact from honest minds. To be a Christian in any real sense, you must start from a dogma of the most tremendous kind, and an undogmatic creed is as senseless as a statue without shape or a picture without colour. Unsectarian means unchristian.

Are we, then, to assume that with averted eyes and hesitating steps men are abandoning, or have already substantially abandoned, the old creeds, and quietly preserved the name whilst tacitly adding a neutralising epithet? If some facts might be alleged in favour of that view, there are not wanting many which may be

advanced on the opposite side. The preachers who lament over the progress of infidelity boast also of the revival which has passed over all creeds within the present century. The old trunk continues to put out fresh shoots. Churches have risen all over the land; schools have been built; priests are supported; and the increase of the spiritual provision is overtaking the increase of the population. The cold breath of the eighteenth-century scepticism has passed away. Voltaire has done his worst; Darwinism and the other agencies of which Strauss speaks have destroyed the outworks instead of the citadel; and the reconciliation of faith and reason, distant as it may still appear, is beginning dimly to shadow itself forth on the far horizon. Which is the main stream and which the eddy? The great protest against the old dogmatism has liberated the intellect from obsolete fetters; but may it not turn out that the intellect will itself frame laws substantially identical with the old? Some obvious deductions must indeed be made. Church-building is a very pretty amusement for rich men. There has been an immensely increased expenditure upon all kinds of luxury, and ecclesiastical luxury has of course increased with the rest. There is a taste for painted windows as there is a taste for Venetian glass; and perhaps the tithe which rich men pay to religious purposes has not increased in proportion to their expenditure on purposes of a purely selfish kind. Antiquarianism has become a popular amusement,

instead of being confined to a few. We have the South Kensington Museum, instead of the few petty collections of which Strawberry Hill was the most prominent example. We have built real churches, and put in them real priests in real vestments, instead of running up a few sham ruins like our respected grandfathers. The restoration, as we are pleased to call it, of a modern cathedral, provides some pleasant excitement for the surrounding nobility and gentry; and the only misfortune is that our toy is too big to be put in a museum. And then, too, the expenditure on religious institutions is part of the insurance which we all have to pay against 'blazing principles.' What with communists and members of the International, we are too much in the position of people sitting on a powder magazine to be quite comfortable. It pays from a purely commercial point of view to support the Establishment. We send out our 'black dragoons' into every parish, agents of social order, whose duty it is to assure agricultural peasants and others—first, that they are very comfortable; secondly, that submission is a Christian duty; and finally, that they ought to set their affections on things above, and not upon houses and lands which belong to other people. The Christian religion, as some people seem to think, had an uncomfortable dash of socialism in its early ages, but has now become an excellent bulwark to the rights of property. It provides a harmless vent for a good deal of ugly enthusiasm; a dissenting hymn,

æsthetically objectionable, is a much safer expression of sentiment than the Marseillaise; and the wild rant about hell fire is more convenient than allusions to the incendiary properties of petroleum. Indeed, we are sincere enough. We have been to the brink of the volcano, and we did not like the glimpses we caught of the seething masses of inflammatory matter at the bottom. The effect was fairly to startle us back into any old creed which led to less disastrous results. The Pope, or the Archbishop of Canterbury, or even Mr. Spurgeon, are much more satisfactory guides than the prophets of the revolution, and we may willingly swallow a few dogmas in which we do not quite believe, to secure the alliance of powerful manifestations of popular impulses. Even Gibbon, when he saw the outbreak of the first French revolution, became an admirer of the Church of England. To decide for how much motives of this kind may count in the general movement is of course impossible. Every strong current of feeling is derived from complex sources, and the base and selfish interests have their part in it as well as the noblest. Indeed, it would be absurd to stigmatise as essentially ignoble all that we call the purely reactionary or even the purely dilettante elements of the new-born zeal. Their existence is a proof how much remains to be done before the subversive school can satisfy men's imaginations and provide a bond capable of holding society together with its ancient solidity. It would be equally

foolish and cynical, even in those who have most distinctly parted company with the old beliefs, to overlook the generosity and the sincerity displayed by the loyal adherents of the dying cause. In that, as in all other movements which stir men's souls profoundly, there must undoubtedly be a groundwork of true faith and heroism. The difficulty is to decide how far the impulse comes from external contagion, and how far it is derived from the native and unexhausted forces of the ancient creeds. The flame of zeal lighted up by the heretics spreads also to their antagonists. When, from any causes, a vigorous stimulant is acting upon the world, a more rapid current of circulation is driven through the old channels as well as through the new. The phenomenon is by itself ambiguous. A stronger sense of the necessity of social revolutions may take the form of increased religious enthusiasm, though at bottom it may have little enough to do with renewed faith in the ancient dogmas. The same impulse may strengthen the hands both of the Positivist and of the Romish priest, and it can only be decided by experiment which provides the best expression for the new emotions that are stirring the foundations of society. That a creed may be permanent, it must satisfy the intellect; but the first impulse comes from the passions, and therefore a revival of belief may be due much more to a change in social conditions than to any process of logical conviction.

Thus the problem of determining what are our

genuine beliefs cannot be decided by simply counting congregations, or adding up subscription lists, any more than by a simple inspection of creeds. Some means must be discovered of testing the true significance of the evidence. Somewhere under all the mass of loud profession and ambiguous rhetoric there must be a genuine core of belief. If we probe deep enough and long enough, we must, or so we fancy, come in the end to something sound and solid. No one but a practised metaphysician can succeed in balancing his mind for any length of time in an attitude of sceptical equilibrium. Few people, it is true, think coherently, or push their doubts home. They are in one state of mind on Sunday and in another on Monday; they have different religions for their shops and their domestic houses; and yet, chaotic as is the intellectual furniture of most minds, one may find in them some little stock of cherished opinion, or at least of prejudice, which supplies a more or less solid standing ground. There have been periods at which one might say that a man believed what he would fight for; but there are two difficulties in the way of applying such a test now, namely, that we very seldom fight for anything; and, still more, that when we do, we do not generally know for what we are fighting. An Irishman may fancy that he is fighting for the Pope, when he is really fighting from hatred of the Saxon, or from an abstract love of fighting for its own sake; and a clergyman that he is fighting for the Athanasian

Creed, when he is really animated by a wholesome jealousy of Dissenters. The only available method would seem to be an indirect one. A living creed is distinguished from a dead creed by the fact—that it is constantly germinating and associating itself with all our modes of thought; and therefore one may sometimes find out what a man believes, not by asking him point-blank, 'Will you subscribe to such or such an Article?' but by taking him unawares, and judging whether he keeps his dogma in a pigeon hole, to be exhibited on proper occasions, or applies it spontaneously to any task in hand.

Such a test, one might fancy, should have been discoverable in the singular controversy about prayer which has been recently breaking out at intervals. No one could follow it without a melancholy sense of the chaotic mass of beliefs and half-beliefs of which it seemed to indicate the existence. Millions of people, it appears, prostrate themselves daily before their Creator, and when they are asked what they mean by it, they can give no coherent reply. The main result seems to be that they consider it equally irreverent to expect a definite answer and not to expect a definite answer to their requests. The controversialists chose by preference to dwell upon that mere thrust-and-parry of metaphysical fence which is palpably beside the question. Science cannot deny and theology cannot affirm the efficacy of prayer upon purely *à priori* grounds. Independently of observation, a man of

science may as easily believe that the laws of nature should determine rain to follow prayer, as that they should determine rain to follow a fall of the barometer. A theologian cannot assert independently of revelation that the Almighty will attend to our wishes about the weather any more than to our wishes about the motions of the planets. At bottom it is simply a question of fact, and that, indeed, was the meaning of the sufficiently offensive form in which the challenge was uttered. The men of science were repeating the taunt which Elijah aimed at the priests of Baal, 'Is your god asleep? Is he an active agent in the government of the universe, or has he put it into commission to be carried on by the forms of material nature? Is your belief confined to your dreams, or does it apply in the sphere of reality?' Undoubtedly, men who did not profess to share Elijah's commission were justified in refusing a test which carried with it an insult to the object of their worship. What man of piety, or who could even partially sympathise with pious customs, would consent to test the presence of the Almighty as he would test the existence of ozone in the atmosphere? Is some method of spectrum analysis to be applicable to the omnipresent and omnipotent preserver of all things? It was right and natural to appeal to wider experience, but it was right only on condition that the appeal was not a pretext for altogether evading the argument. For the scientific disputant had a right to ask in what sense Providence is to be

regarded as governing the world. That central doctrine of all theology must include a genuine and not a purely verbal proposition, if it is really to affect the lives of men. Unluckily, the answers revealed a curious vagueness and unwillingness to face facts. The real difficulty in believing in the efficacy of prayer in its old sense is generated as much by exalting our ideas of the Creator as by denying our powers of conceiving Him. But the orthodox disputants seemed to be clinging to the belief that God was no more than an invisible but very powerful man; and half-unconsciously trying to reconcile it with the loftier conception of an all-prevailing and all-determining essence. One could not discover whether they believed in Jehovah or in the God of Spinoza. They took refuge in irrelevant metaphysics, and tried to prove—what nobody ever thought of denying—that God could change the weather if He pleased; or they sought to prove that, though it would be foolish to pray against an eclipse, it might be reasonable to pray for rain. One phenomenon is just as much the result of fixed causes as the other; but it is easier for the imagination to suppose the interference of a divine agent to be hidden away somewhere amidst the infinitely complex play of forces which elude our calculations in meteorological phenomena, than to believe in it where the forces are simple enough to admit of prediction. The distinction is of course invalid in a scientific sense. Almighty power can interfere as

easily with the events which are, as with those which are not, set down in the 'Nautical Almanac.' One cannot suppose that God retreats as science advances, and that He spoke in thunder and lightning till Franklin unravelled the laws of their phenomena. But in the border-land between the unknowable and the provinces which have been accurately mapped out by science, the popular imagination may still conceive mysterious agencies to be at work; and what cannot be demonstrated by observation not to exist may be taken as existing for purposes of edification. Yet how can such a theory be expressed in plain language without gross irreverence? A deity who shifts and changes and hides himself away, like the man in the automaton chess-player; who acts when our eyes are averted, and retires behind a screen of second causes when we contemplate facts directly; whom we solemnly implore to help us at need, whilst we carefully explain that the help comes from ourselves, is not a conception calculated to afford a firm centre for an operative religion. It is only natural that the popular view should oscillate by strange bounds from one extreme to the other. We applaud the common sense of the statesman who tells us that cholera is to be avoided by drainage, and not by prayer and fasting. We fall into emotional ecstasies when we are called upon to save a young man from fever by national supplication. If the loyalty was as genuine as the religious faith when all London was thronged by

crowds acknowledging the answer to our prayers, what vital power must still reside in the British constitution!

At the foundation of this strange oscillation and uncertainty lies the difficulty of reconciling the old language to the loftier conception of the universe which is slowly dawning upon men's minds. When a Roman Catholic archbishop says, as he is reported to have done, that we have had too much rain, that it was sent as a punishment for our infidelity, and that it would be stopped at our request, we know not whether to wonder most at the scientific ignorance, or at the narrow conceptions of theology which are implied. The only safe conclusion is, that the object of the archbishop's worship is not the God adored by any intelligent theist. His motives and purposes, it seems, can be guessed and his plans changed more easily than those of Prince Bismarck. When we have any distinct conception of the mode in which all the natural forces are bound up together, how any change propagates fresh changes through all time and space along the infinite chains of causes and effects, we feel how our power of asking must be limited by our utter ignorance of that for which we ask. A request for more rain—even a request for another loaf of bread—is a request for an infinite series of operations utterly beyond our knowledge. It is the old story:—

> 'Ye gods, annihilate but space and time,
> And make two lovers happy!'

The insect asks that the pebble which obstructs its path may be removed; and it really asks, though it knows it not, that mountains may be uprooted, and the climate of continents changed. Nor is a belief in the efficacy of prayer—understood in this sense—reconcilable with any lofty form of theism. What can a prayer from man to the Ruler of the universe express beyond a cry for relief and a confession of utter ignorance? At a certain mental stage, religion means a belief in an invisible poor-law board which will give outdoor relief on application; as at another period it means a belief, naïvely expressed by the amiable Tucker, who says that heaven is a supernatural bank, with the advantage that, unlike the Bank of England, it can never break, and it allows us an enormous rate of interest for any temporary sacrifice of pleasure. The deeper the genuine sentiment of religion, the more impossible it is to retain such a conception. Is it necessary, then, that prayer should become meaningless when it ceases to be a draft payable at sight for so much comfort, as the school of Paley and Tucker taught that virtue would be meaningless unless justified by a prospect of future reward? That is the tacit assumption of the orthodox, and the reason of their protest against the more scientific conception. Yet the belief that we can work a small miracle is surely not the essence of what is really ennobling in prayer. One of the old deists[1] says, not

[1] Peter Annet, the last of his race, and, in some sense, the connecting link between Collins and Tom Paine.

ungracefully, in the midst of some brutal remarks about Christianity, that men praying resemble sailors who have cast anchor on a rock, and who fancy that they are pulling the rock to them when they are really pulling themselves to the rock. Frankly to adopt that conception, and to accommodate our language to it, involves too great a breach with our old phraseology. And yet, if we adopted it, prayer might still be left as the utterance of the deepest emotions of which human nature is susceptible, and as the mode by which we may discipline our imaginations to sink our own selfish interests in wider sympathies, in nobler aspirations, and in a deeper sense of our close connection with the interests of the universe. Comte, as we know, valued prayer so highly that he endeavoured to maintain the practice, whilst denying altogether the possibility of addressing the Creator. He spent, it is said, an hour daily in prayer to a dead woman as the vivid symbol of humanity. Such a practice is, of course, utterly unintelligible on the view which makes prayer a request for a definite object, in the same sense as a beggar's address to a rich man. But the unwillingness to adopt any such substitute for the old practice so indissolubly associated with every feeling that has ennobled the first history of the world, seems to prove something more. Prayer, decisively purified from every trace of the beliefs in which it originated, does not at present, if it ever will, satisfy the imagination. We must pray—so we reason—to raise our

minds above material and selfish objects, and, to be sufficiently impressive, prayer must recognise something behind the veil of the visible world.

The ordinary mind, even whilst confessing its impotence to pierce behind that veil, refuses to obey the Positivist advice, to abandon altogether its search for the absolute and the infinite. The horizon offered by this planet, and including only its inhabitants, seems to be too limited for our needs; the walls of that prison-house are so close that we feel the atmosphere to be stifling. We are exhorted to renounce an empty search into the origin of life, and be content with the fact that we are living; to cease to pry into the constitution of the stars, and to be satisfied with astronomical knowledge enough for purposes of navigation. And yet the growing curiosity with which such studies are pursued seems to reveal a dim suspicion, not merely that apparently fruitless researches may lead to practically useful results, but that we may be following out the clue which will serve to answer the great enigma. The notion may be groundless; and it may be that, after poring upon spectra, and tracing the development of plants and insects to the farthest limits of observation, we shall not have penetrated even by an infinitesimal degree below the surface to which we are inexorably confined. We may handle the veil as much as we please, but we cannot raise it. Go as far back as we please along the chain of causes and effects, we never discover the

hand that links them. And yet, though the old conception of the watchmaker and of final causes is somewhat decayed, we persist in believing that by tracing out a wider arc of the orbit, we are coming nearer to some dim perception of the overruling purpose which has started and which still guides the whole scheme of things. In Strauss's phraseology it would be said that, whilst abandoning the old theology, we are seeking to replace it by a consciousness of that vague entity which he describes as the All. Prayer, vaguely as we grasp the popular conception, seems to be a blind protest against the possibility of permanently imprisoning the intellect within the barriers of physical science. We cannot, in obedience to science, summarily quench those

> 'obstinate questionings
> Of sense and outward things'

which still perplex the world's old age as they brightened its infancy. The 'light of common day is too blank and dreary to satisfy our souls. In spite of all previous failures of philosophers and divines, we can no more resolve to abandon our dreams than to attribute to them an objective reality. The conflict between our aspirations and our genuine faith leads to many grotesque and to some degrading manifestations, but is, on the whole, far more pathetic than ludicrous.

The question, however, remains, What effect does this indefinite state of mind produce upon our lives? Does it entitle us to be called, in any intelligible sense,

Christians? Does that inarticulate conviction give so firm a standing-ground as materially to affect our conduct, or is it merely retained because some sense of awful mystery is necessary to the imagination? Are we like men whose guiding star has become indistinct and shadowy, but yet serves to direct their course; or are we conscious of its light merely as a diffused glow, colouring the bare world with a magical harmony, but affording no indication to impel us in any definite direction? If our hopes of immortality be unfounded, says St. Paul, then are we of all men the most miserable. The statement is susceptible of an unpleasant interpretation; for it may easily be pressed into the service of people who hold that the only object of being virtuous is to win a pension in this world or the next; but in a less literal sense it must be true of every revealed religion. What could be more cruel to the most unselfish hero than to find that his whole scheme of life had been laid out on a false hypothesis, and that he had been guiding his followers into the wilderness instead of the promised land? To have erased from St. Paul's creed his faith in a future world, would have been to destroy the thread which alone held together the whole network of interwoven beliefs. It would at once have fallen into a hopelessly intricate tangle. The universe would have appeared to him as a blind jumble of incoherent forces. He would not have felt that his loss was confined simply to the weakening of one motive to virtue, but rather that

his whole system of thought was, as it were, dislocated and paralysed. The belief in the life beyond the grave is in some creeds merely a beautiful and elevating but, in the strict sense, a superfluous corollary from the other doctrines. Its loss would be sensibly felt, but it would not change the practical lessons of life. In others it is the base, which cannot be removed without bringing down the whole superstructure in ruin. Which is the case with ourselves?

We may judge by trying to place ourselves for a moment in the position of men who really believe in some of the old doctrines now repeated so glibly, because with so little meaning. To them the present world appears to be a scene of misery; its pleasures are empty delusions; to partake of them is to run the risk of sullying our souls, and he is best who yields least to the temptations of the senses. Marriage is not the natural state of man, but a concession to our baser passions, mercifully granted to avoid worse evils. The virgin life is the highest, and to mortify the flesh and wean ourselves from the world the only course that can entitle us to eternal rewards. We are sojourners here, and properly denizens of a purer abode from which we have been exiled for a time, and which the corruption of our natures prevents us from distinctly viewing with our earthly vision. Our best hope is that the whole visible framework of the universe may be dissolved, and a new heaven and new earth be revealed to our wayworn souls. 'If man be-

fore he was born,' as Jeremy Taylor expresses the genuine sentiment, 'knew what he was to suffer in his life, he would not be born at all: therefore Silenus, being demanded what was the greatest happiness man was capable of, said, "Not be born, or to die quickly."' The spirit of man is clogged and debased by the vile clay with which it is mixed, and the whole purpose of the world is, by some supernatural chemistry, to extract the finer essence from the alloy into which it has been plunged. Such a doctrine is, of course, only tenable if the future life appears to be as real as the present, or, indeed, to have a more intense reality. In the lower forms of the creed, the belief is necessary, because otherwise we could never be repaid for the tortures which we have undergone; it is equally necessary in the higher forms, because otherwise our whole activity has been directed to a chimerical aim. A lifelong and internecine struggle with the elements of which this life is composed, is nonsensical if this life be all, and our power necessarily limited to making the best of the world as it is.

The creed of the genuine ascetic, even where it is most vigorously entertained, does not, of course, produce a corresponding effect upon men's lives. The ties by which we are bound to the world and the flesh are infinitely too strong to be broken by any imaginative doctrine. Divines of all classes, Roman Catholic priests and Dissenting ministers, strain their powers to give form and colouring to the scenes which are to terrify or to allure us. With eternity and infinite

power to draw upon, it is their own fault if the picture be not sufficiently brilliant.

> 'The weariest and most loathèd worldly life
> That age, ache, penury, and imprisonment
> Can lay on nature, is a paradise
> To what we fear of death.'

For the fears have been stimulated by the simple process of taking all that is most horrible in this world, and conceiving it as multiplied in intensity and duration till the imagination faints under the burden. The result does not correspond to the benevolent intentions of the artists, partly because the imagination is sluggish, and a tacit revolt is produced by too exorbitant drafts upon our powers of belief, and partly too because the artists themselves are compelled to devise modes of escape from the horrors which they have depicted. The power of the Church to remit the penalties, or of some change in the individual to avoid them, grows in proportion to the rigour of the penalties themselves, and the terms of escape are arranged in such a way as not to bear too hardly upon human weakness. All bad men, it is proclaimed, will be damned; but we, it is whispered, possess the key to some convenient back-door which will enable you to slink into paradise without too great a sacrifice of your natural passions.

It would be absurd, therefore, to measure the vitality of the creed by the degree in which it actually produces the effect at which it is ostensibly aimed. The vilest licentiousness constantly exists in the very

places where its consequences are believed, in all sincerity, to be most unspeakably momentous. Indeed, to condemn human nature as corrupt has a very strong tendency to increase the corruption of human nature. But wherever such a creed is powerful, the moral standard, though not the lives of the believers, will be altered. An ascetic religion will not produce a whole nation of ascetics, and it may at times exist in a whole nation of voluptuaries; but it will show itself in the moral type which they admire. Their saints, real or imaginary, will be men who have issued from the world and its cares to cultivate the spiritual faculties. The criterion of virtue will not be the tendency of actions to improve this life, but their tendency to encourage indifference to temporal interests. Charity will be admirable, not in so far as it tends to eradicate poverty, but in so far as it imposes sacrifices upon the benevolent; and a man will be admired if, without directly contributing to the happiness of others, he has deliberately made himself miserable during his earthly pilgrimage.

What, then, is the ordinary creed of our modern society upon these points of morals? Is the ascetic or the utilitarian code of morality most in harmony with our practice, or rather with our theories? What type of virtue would an average Englishman or American most admire?—that which is embodied in an inmate of the Chartreuse, who slowly and silently tortures himself to death on the summit of a bleak mountain; or

that which is embodied in a clergyman, with a wife and twelve children, good clothes and kitchen, and even a tolerable cellar of wine, who yet does his duty manfully, like the hard-working doctor or lawyer who lives next door, and who succeeds in diminishing drunkenness and in increasing the deposits in the savings bank of the neighbourhood? If virtue is to be measured by the extent of the victory won over natural passions, the monk has of course an indefinite superiority; if by the degree in which a man's activity is subservient to the welfare of his fellow-man, the balance inclines as decidedly in the opposite direction. The monk may be thoroughly and grossly selfish, for he may be calculating on a tenfold repayment; and the clergyman may have acted in every case upon the most chivalrous motives. His marriage may have been a great act of self-denial; and he may sincerely hold even that the comfort in which he lives is necessary to fit his children to play their parts as refined and accomplished members of the class to which they belong. The ultimate motives are beyond our judgment; but we may ask which type of humanity is most likely to flourish in the soil of modern society? Nor can the answer be for a moment doubtful. Those who hate most and those who most admire the tendencies summed up in what we call progress are pretty well agreed as to some of the characteristics implied. An observer, for example, like Tocqueville is never tired of writing upon the passion for material well-being, which, according to him,

is the distinguishing mark of modern democracy. To fit people for this world rather than for the next seems to be the sole object of modern philanthropists and statesmen. If we wish to denounce the dominant tendencies of the age, we call them materialising, and argue that Christianity is more than ever necessary to save us from the grovelling worship of the almighty dollar. If we approve of them, we urge that a religion which confines itself to condemning the world cannot really leaven it with higher influences. The heat of pious enthusiasm which, under the old forms of belief, radiated into the void of infinite space, must be retained within our atmosphere to give light and warmth on earth. Religion, to retain its vitality, must sanctify the ordinary passions of men, and not fruitlessly aim at their extirpation. Can the motives provided by Christianity receive this application? That was no doubt the opinion of the benevolent persons who, some years ago, invented the name of Christian socialism; and it is implied in the various attempts of the Church of Rome to form an alliance between the priests and the populace. Why should not Christianity, as of old, be the great force for the upheaval of society? Is not the alliance between the Church and the ancient political framework merely a temporary accident; and may not the principles of Christian morality be represented as identical with those of a modern radical? The revolutionists, who repudiated the old faith along with the old rulers, were perhaps rejecting the force

which could alone have given them the necessary consistency for winning a final victory. The intellectual difficulties which have alienated the class represented by Strauss's 'we,' have little significance for the lowest social stratum. A New York Irishman or a Belgian peasant is not much affected by the results of historical criticism and scientific discovery. Why then should there be any mutual repulsion between the modern democrats and those who boast of a succession from the ancient fishermen of Galilee? The founder of our religion was called the first *sans culotte;* and passing over the irreverence of the phrase, it expressed an important analogy. The sentiments to which the early Christians appealed were in many respects the same as those to which our modern socialists owe their strength.

The most fundamental difficulty in the way of such an alliance lies in the difference of the remedy suggested. The doctrine of the early Christians proceeded from men who renounced the world as the scene of a brutal tyranny, but looked for safety to passive submission, instead of active revolt. They accepted poverty and suffering as inevitable, and sought for a refuge in the hopes of another world, or of a millennium to be brought about by miraculous agencies. The modern socialist aspires to conquer the world, instead of withdrawing from it, and would extirpate rather than idealise poverty. His millennium is to be won by his own efforts, and he contemplates entrance into Utopia instead of heaven. The promised land to which he

looks forward is not an eternity of happiness, where he will be freed from the body and its cares, but an indefinite vista of material and social progress. He will not walk with saints and angels, and sing hymns of praise to his Creator throughout all ages; but he anticipates a time when capital will be the servant instead of the master of labour; when every man will have a fair day's wages for a fair day's work; when intelligent co-operation will be substituted for blind competition, and the crushing burden of poverty which now bends him to the earth will be finally removed. The vision is less splendid, for he has no longer an unbounded field for his imagination; but it is more tangible. It must be gained, not by prayer and fasting, but by the sweat of his brow, and it must be the reward of the industrial and not of the ascetic virtues. A belief in immortality is not incompatible with such a view of man's destiny and purposes; nay, it is easy to maintain that it is essential in order to balance the materialising tendencies of the doctrine; but the hope of immortality expresses a different set of sentiments. To a Christian of the old type the vision of heaven and hell must be as vivid as possible, in order to express his abhorrence of the existing order. There must be some place where Lazarus could be made equal with Dives; for in this world he could only look forward to a life of hopeless bondage. But when Lazarus expects to compel Dives to share his wealth with his humbler brethren, a change comes over the spirit of his dream. He conceives of

the next life, so far as he cares to conceive of it at all, rather as a prolongation of this than as a contrast to it. He cannot bear to think that all the kindly affections which run so cruelly to waste in this world—the love for the dead who have been taken from us, the noble aspirations that never meet with any adequate fulfilment—should be entirely dispersed without any adequate satisfaction. But he has a strong enough hope of good being ultimately realised here not to feel the necessity of a heaven to make the thought of the universe endurable. In spite of his discontent with the existing order of things, he is on the whole in too good humour with himself and the world to feel any great need of a hell. When brutal tyranny is no longer definitely triumphant, he does not wish to punish his oppressors with eternal torments. Progress, though a vague enough word, means the hope that things will somehow right themselves on earth in the course of time; and it is no longer necessary to throw out the present misery of the good and the past happiness of the wicked against a background in which their future positions may be reversed. The hope of immortality, therefore, is acceptable in so far as it seems to give a loftier view of human nature, but does not materially modify the character of its aspirations.

Whether the change of sentiment thus described be or be not a subject for congratulation is a wide question: but it suggests the criterion which should decide whether we have or have not a right to the ancient

title. There are, in fact, two courses which may be taken by those who believe in the continued vitality of Christian ideas. They may retain or reject what may be briefly called the ascetic element of the creed; all the beliefs, that is, which gather round the doctrine that man's duty here is not to make the best of this world, but to prepare himself for another. The ultramontane party boldly adhere to the first plan of action, and assert, as Dr. Manning has lately done, that their doctrines are not incompatible with progress. And of course it is undeniable that Romanism, like most other known forms of belief, denounces drunkenness, cruelty, and stealing, and is, so far, favourable to the honesty, sobriety, and other virtues which are essential conditions of progress. But the true difficulty of reconciling it to what is meant (so far as anything definite is meant) by progress remains in full force. There is, of course, the intellectual difficulty—the utter impossibility of reconciling science and history as taught by the impartial inquirers, with the science and history as countenanced at Rome. But from that root spring difficulties of still wider and deeper character. First is the difficulty of giving real vitality to a faith which cramps and ultimately destroys all genuine love of speculative truth. The mob care little, it may be, for difficulties which affect Strauss or Mr. Darwin; their brains are too torpid to be directly sensitive to the disturbances in a region of the atmosphere inaccessible to them. And yet when the brain is paralysed, even

the organs which enjoy a mere vegetative existence gradually feel the change. Practically, what is proposed is a compromise degrading and ultimately corrupting. The cultivated classes are invited to acquiesce in a creed which they do not believe, or, in plainer language, to sanction systematic lying on consideration that the priests will keep the dangerous classes quiet. The dangerous classes are to give up their objectionable schemes, and to receive in exchange a good comfortable religious narcotic. Playing with the old-fashioned ecclesiastical toys, they are to forget their dreams of turning the world upside down. Undoubtedly there are many easy-going people who would be only too glad to accept that compromise for the sake of peace—that is to say, of their own comfort. Unluckily, there are difficulties in the way. In the first place, systematic lying does not answer in the long run; and in the next place, the compromise turns out to be a delusion, for the strongest party is not to be so easily hoodwinked. If the revolutionary party would accept priestly guidance, it would only be on condition that the priests would guide them in the direction they desire. That the priest may become a demagogue, he must appeal to the passions upon which the demagogue works; and the only question would be which party to the alliance would be making tools of the other. If the priests were the dupes, our last case would be worse than the first, and we should be soon protesting against the most degrading tyranny which ever yet entered

the world; but in the other, the highest success must be won at a price fatal not only to democracy, but to progress in any intelligible sense. Imagine, in fact, a state of things in which the religion of all cultivated men is an organised hypocrisy, and in which the religion of the lower means that they are drilled to obey a priestly order; that humility is to be preached instead of independence, that poverty is to be consecrated instead of extirpated, and every spark of intellectual activity carefully trodden out for fear of an explosion. Practically that means that the population is to be emasculated in order that it may be kept quiet; and that society is to consist of a superstructure of effeminate rich men with a foundation of contented and superstitious paupers. Certainly some virtues might flourish under such a state of things. Sobriety, honesty, and chastity might abound, as they abound in some priest-ridden countries; but directly they bore their natural fruit, and gave rise to truthfulness, independence, and the masculine virtues, fresh opiates must be applied to lull the masses once more into indifference. That such a consummation should be contemplated by cowards who have been frightened out of their belief in mankind, or in a divine superintendence of the world by the apparition of the red spectre, is intelligible though it is melancholy; but it cannot be tolerated by any one who has some remaining faith in the old precept of telling truth and shaming the devil. Like Goldsmith, indeed, many people want to be well

out of the reach of his claws before trying the experiment. They would rather soothe him by a little judicious equivocation, than fight him face to face.

Undoubtedly priests, dukes, and other presumably educated persons can manage to grovel before the shrine of a Marie Alacoque. Treat believing as a branch of gymnastics and there is nothing, however revolting, which you may not train yourself to swallow. With care and practice you might cultivate a belief in witchcraft, astrology, or palmistry. A morbid love of the marvellous is not yet extinct in human nature, and even Cagliostro is not without modern successors. The system of drilling the mind into a docile acceptance of outworn superstitions may produce results interesting to psychologists. That it can ever generate a body of doctrine worthy to be called a religion will be believed by no one who has any faith in his race. You may train a clever man to abdicate his reason when he goes inside a church. You cannot form a stable creed which revolts every man of intellect who wishes to think systematically and honestly. And, therefore, it is needless to ask what would be the true name of such a faith, or whether such a hybrid form of opinion as a combination of a rational view of the universe for ordinary, with an irrational view for ecclesiastical purposes, would deserve to be called Christianity.

Men of far greater intellectual weight propose to adopt the alternative, and try to preach Christianity in such a way as not to run counter to the best aspirations of

mankind. The question remains, whether the doctrines which they would preach are really Christian doctrines reconciled to reason, or rationalism thinly veiled under Christian phraseology? Which is the substance and which is the shadow? The answer would seem to depend upon the reply which we give to certain other questions. We can, for the thing has been done, use the old phraseology to represent new beliefs. We can talk about the corruption of mankind, when we really cherish a firm belief in progress and in the natural origin of all the virtuous instincts. We may say that Christianity is of divine origin, whilst we admit that, however much it differs in degree, it is identical in kind with all the other religions that move the world. We may express a belief in supernatural intervention in some past epochs, though banishing it from the present, and explaining that even in the past the supernatural was somehow the natural. We may continue to pray, whilst repudiating as superstitious or presumptuous all the meanings which men once attributed to prayer. We may talk about another world, whilst expressing disgust at all the purposes to which that belief was once applied, and explicitly founding our moral code on the necessity of adapting mankind to the conditions of this life, and denouncing every attempt to fit them for another. All this is possible, and many people draw the inference that it does not much matter which set of words we use: best, they think, use those which give the least shock to the

vulgar. Against that doctrine I have tried to protest, in the interests of what I take to be honesty to ourselves and to others. But, at any rate, I confess that it appears to me to be a mere misnomer to call this body of doctrine Christian. And, therefore, I should be inclined to extend Strauss's answer to cover a still larger area. No! I should reply; we are not Christians; a few try to pass themselves off as Christians, because, whilst substantially men of this age, they can cheat themselves into using the old charms in the desperate attempt to conjure down alarming social symptoms; a great number call themselves Christians, because, in one way or another, the use of the old phrases and the old forms is still enforced by the great sanction of respectability; and some for the higher reason, that they fear to part with the grain along with the chaff; but such men have ceased substantially, though only a few have ceased avowedly, to be Christian in any intelligible sense of the name. How long the shadow ought to survive the substance is a question which may be commended to serious consideration.

CHAPTER V.

A BAD FIVE MINUTES IN THE ALPS.

It was bad weather in the Alps. The valley was roofed by a level mass of iron-grey cloud, behind which the existence of sun and sky was matter of faith. Trailing wreaths of mist descended white and ghost-like through the gorges; an uneasy wind moaned round the projecting eaves of the little cluster of châlets that called itself a village; from every spout a miniature waterfall leapt into the main street —little more than a cart-track at the best of times, and now a mere tributary to the glacier torrent that boiled with unusual vehemence round the huge boulders in its bed. Inside the inn the scene was not much more cheerful. It was a well-known centre for the tourist population, and English and Americans had gathered in great force from remoter districts in order to spend a Sunday after their fashion. There was scarcely standing-room even in the passages, where guides and their employers formed knots, discussing in a revolutionary temper the perverse administration of the weather. The very atmosphere was

damp and sodden: the walls reeked with moisture, and the clouds of tobacco smoke hung heavily about the heads of the crowd, in unconscious imitation of the natural mists outside. Perhaps it was not unfair to assume that the Anglican congregation which occupied the dining-room of the establishment owed something to the want of any counter attraction. No great influence could be attributed, at any rate, to the eloquence of the worthy clergyman who rejoiced in so fine an opportunity for speaking a word in season. The sermon remains imprinted on my mind less for any intrinsic peculiarity than for a certain reason to be presently assigned. The preacher was a benevolent and sensible man, enjoying a holiday well earned by energetic labours at home. No one could have given shrewder and kinder advice in any practical difficulty, or had a keener sense of the value of clearness and truthfulness in ordinary affairs of life; and so he calmly retailed his lengths of theological shoddy—old fragments of decaying systems woven into a web of the usual polish and flimsiness. He proved with great satisfaction to himself that a belief in the eternal damnation of unbelievers was a highly consoling doctrine. Of course I knew well that, as a matter of fact, my worthy friend would not willingly injure a fly, and that, so far from injuring the hair of a heretic's head, he would on no account hurt his feelings. It was only in words that he would attribute to his God a course of conduct which he would be the first to

condemn in a fellow-creature. The knowledge of the utter unreality of his sentiments prevented any feeling of dislike, but it gave me a melancholy sense of the futility of the worthy preacher's eloquence. Could any prodigal son of the Church satisfy his spiritual appetite with these dry husks of obsolete speculation? Discontented and wearied, I retired to the reading-room and seized upon the only available literature, in the shape of a back number or two of a highly respectable periodical. There I found that a very energetic controversy was raging as to the efficacy of prayer. Some bold man had asserted that prayer was an obsolete superstition; that, pray as men would, the rain would not cease till the barometer rose; and that a good surgeon was worth incomparably more, in case of a broken limb, than supplications to all the saints in heaven. Much elaborate argumentation was opposed to the infidel; but the bulk of it seemed to be singularly wide of the mark. Correspondents proved—what surely no one could deny—that, as God can do anything, He can, if He chooses, give health or fine weather, and may give them in answer to prayer. Some of them proved, with equal ease, that many things had happened for which people had prayed; or even tried to show, by old newspaper cuttings and vague stories of wonder, that here and there, at remote times and in distant regions, things had sometimes happened which implied the interference of a supernatural power. It might be all very true, and

yet there was something depressing in this spectacle of sincere and religious people hunting painfully for some proof that the God whom they professed to adore was something more than a mere name. Here, in this remote Alpine district, the unsophisticated natives attach a different meaning to words. Had I not met a little procession praying for fine weather at a remote mountain chapel, and apparently believing that their conduct was just as rational as if they had been petitioning the State for a new road? Was not the village church filled with votive offerings, with inscriptions showing how on a given occasion the Virgin or some favourite saint had shielded a peasant from the descent of an avalanche, or pushed aside the trunk which was falling on his head? Here, it was plain enough, the objects of worship were real beings, who actually interfered when they were requested, though it is true that they have shown some reluctance to intrude themselves into the midst of tourists from the outside world. But what kind of Deity was that in which these controversialists believed? They could define his nature with the utmost accuracy, and damn all who differed from their conclusions by so much as a hair's breadth; and yet they had recourse to long and refined arguments to prove—not that he governed the general course of affairs—but that every now and then, at long intervals, he possibly gave a fillip to the working of the machinery of the universe, though always in so modest a fashion that it was an open

question whether his action was perceptible or not. They were content to show that the contrary hypothesis was not irrevocably established. Imagine an argument to prove the existence of Bismarck or Mr. Gladstone, or to show that heat and light really play a part in the affairs of the world! Yet it seems that the Being whose existence is the central object of every creed can only be detected at rare opportunities and by dint of a series of far-fetched deductions which defy the ingenuity of ordinary men. There is surely something ominous in this strange combination of scholastic nicety in the sphere of pure speculation with the utter vagueness and uncertainty which hangs like a mist round all beliefs that bear upon practice.

I was seized with that queer sensation of discord which sometimes overtakes one in certain situations. I have pored over moth-eaten volumes of ancient learning in a dusty library till I seemed to have passed into a dreamland of shadowy ghosts. The phantoms of old authors long dead and buried, seemed to be evoked from the dim, forgotten pages, and to be hovering around me—not perceivable by the bodily organs, though their presence was vaguely divined by the still embodied soul. So unearthly has seemed the borderland between the visionary and the actual, that I have rushed out into the world of common sights and sounds to assure myself of my continued corporal existence. But here my mind felt the discordant jar between the past and the present in a different shape;

a real flesh and blood human being spoke; but his voice was the voice of the dead; the outside world, as I sat in the reading-room, was only too tangible and concrete; my ears were full of the voices of ladies discussing the last inn and the prospects of the weather; my toes were in danger from the nail-studded boots of athletic tourists, who stumped discontentedly through the inn and framed plans for the assault of peaks and passes. The thought came to me that I would retire to the dim mountain side, where human nature might be forgotten, and where, perhaps, I could find some breath from the dead centuries lingering amongst the eternal hills. There, at least, I could give myself up, without interruption, to the train of thought that had been suggested, and, like a magician in the wilderness, summon up the ghosts of the dead to reveal their true meaning. Actuated partly by this impulse and partly by the more vulgar motive of acquiring an appetite for dinner, I resolved to take a stroll in spite of the heavens. Leaving the little Babel of distracted life, I was soon breasting a steep slope behind the village. Every tree and every blade of grass was soaked and saturated in wet; the path was a series of puddles rapidly connecting themselves into rivulets; the veil of rain first softened the outlines of the houses, and then speedily blotted out the whole village from my sight. An hour or two of resolute tramping and I was wet to the skin—a mere animated sponge, living on my supplies of internal

warmth. Vigorous exercise soon put a stop to all cerebral action except that which was concentrated on finding the way—no very easy task in the pervading gloom. I had, however, reached a little upland glen well known to me as offering, in fine weather, a grand view of distant snow-peaks through the jaws of the cliffs. It was time to return, and the demon who amuses himself by beguiling Alpine travellers suggested the memory of a certain short cut which involved a bit of amusing scrambling. I was speedily occupied in fighting my way downwards through a steep ravine, cloven by a vicious little torrent from a lofty glacier, when—how it happened I know not, for all forms of earth and grassy slope were obliterated at a few yards by the descending showers—I suddenly found that I had left the right track and was descending too sharply towards the stream. At the same time I saw, or thought I saw, that by crossing the face of a cliff for a few yards I should regain the ordinary route. The first step or two was easy; then came a long stride, in which I had to throw out one hand by way of grappling-iron to a jutting rock above. The rock was reeking with the moisture, and as I threw my weight upon it my hand slipped, and before I had time to look round I was slithering downwards without a single point of support. Below me, as I well knew, at a depth of some two hundred feet, was the torrent. One plunge through the air upon its rugged stones and I should be a heap of mangled

flesh and bones. Instinctively I flung abroad arms and legs in search of strong supports; in another moment I was brought up with a jerk. My hands now rested on the narrow ledge where my feet had been a moment before, and one foot was propped by some insecure support whose nature I could not precisely determine. During the fall—it can hardly have lasted for a second—I had space for only one thought; it was that which had more than once occurred to me in somewhat similar situations, and might be summed up in the single ejaculation—'at last!' Expanded to greater length, it was the one startled reflection that the experience which I had so often gone through in imagination was now at length to be known to me in the bitter reality. It was the single flash of emotion which—as one may guess—passes through the brain of the criminal when the drop falls, or the signal is given to the firing party. I had often made my way along dangerous ridges bounded by cliffs of gigantic height; I had clung to steep walls of ice and passed shiveringly across profound crevasses; a partial slip in such places had given me some faint foretaste of the sensation produced by an accident, and the single thought—if it may be called a thought—that occurred to me was this electric shock of colourless expectation. I call it colourless, for the space was too brief to allow even of conscious alarm or horror. Another half-second, and all thought would have been summarily stopped; but when I suddenly felt that I was

no longer falling, the next wave of emotion was compounded of vehement excitement and a sort of instinctive sense that everything might depend on my retaining presence of mind. Desperately choking back the surging emotions that seemed to shake my limbs, I sought for some means of escape. By slowly moving my left hand I managed to grasp a stem of rhododendron which grew upon the ledge of rock, and felt tolerably firm; next I tried to feel for some support with the toe of my left boot; the rock, however, against which it rested, was not only hard, but exquisitely polished by the ancient glacier which had forced its way down the gorge. A geologist would have been delighted with this admirable specimen of the planing powers of nature; I felt, I must confess, rather inclined to curse geology and glaciers. Not a projecting ledge, corner, or cranny could I discover; I might as well have been hanging against a pane of glass. With my right foot, however, I succeeded in obtaining a more satisfactory lodgment; had it not been for this help I could only have supported myself so long as my arms would hold out, and I have read somewhere that the strongest man cannot hold on by his arms alone for more than five minutes. I am, unluckily, very weak in the arms, and was therefore quite unable to perform the gymnastic feat of raising myself till I could place a knee upon the ledge where my hands were straining. Here, then, I was, in an apparently hopeless predicament. I might cling to

the rocks like a bat in a cave till exhaustion compelled me to let go; on a very liberal allowance, that might last for some twenty minutes, or, say half an hour. There was, of course, a remote chance that some traveller or tourist might pass through the glen; but the ordinary path lay some hundred yards above my head, on the other side of a rock pinnacle, and a hundred yards was, for all practical purposes, the same thing as a hundred miles; the ceaseless roar of the swollen torrent would drown my voice as effectually as a battery of artillery; but, for a moment or two, I considered the propriety of shouting for help. The problem was, whether I should diminish my strength more by the effort of shouting than the additional chance of attracting attention was worth. If the effort shortened my lasting powers by five minutes, it would so far diminish the time during which succour could be brought to any purpose. I had not the necessary data for calculation, and was not exactly in a frame of mind adapted for cool comparison of figures; but a spasm of despair kept me silent. Help in any form seemed too unlikely to be worth taking into account; the one thing left was to live as long as I could, though, to say the truth, five minutes' life on such a rack was a very questionable advantage. The vague instinct of self-preservation, however, survived its reason; all that I could really hope was that, by husbanding my strength as carefully as possible, I might protract existence till about the

time when the dinner-bell would be ringing for my friends—a quarter of an hour away. Well, I would protract it—indeed, at times, a thought almost emerged to consciousness that I would make it as agreeable as might be under the circumstances; but that, I need not say, was a thought which, however sensible, had too much of mockery in it to be explicitly adopted. In dumb obstinacy I clung as firmly as might be to the rocks, and did my best to postpone the inevitable crash. Yet I felt that it was rapidly approaching, and felt it at times almost with a sense of relief.

It is often said that persons in similar situations have seen their whole past existence pass rapidly before them. They have lived again every little incident of their lives which had been forgotten in ordinary states of mind. No such vision of the past remains engraved upon my memory; and yet I have a vivid recollection of the general nature of the thoughts that jostled and crowded each other in my mind. For the most part, I seemed to be a passive agent, utterly unable to marshal my ideas or to exercise any choice as to the direction my speculations should take. My will seemed to be annihilated, and I felt like a person to whom, by some magic, the operations of another man's mind should be thrown open for inspection. I was at once the actor and the spectator of a terrible drama—the last moments, for so I then supposed them to be, of a human being under irrevocable sentence of death. My double character enabled me at once to

realise the full bitterness of my emotions, and to record them with ineffaceable accuracy; for I still wake at times from dreams in which the minutest incidents of that half-hour's agony are faithfully reproduced. At times, a storm of bitter indignation at my own folly would hurry through my mind, firing me to bitter outbreaks of unavailing fury. At times, nature itself became an object of antipathy, and I felt a kind of personal dislike to gravitation and the laws of motion. Then, painfully distinct visions would pass before me; I would see my friends below and listen to their conversation, or a whole picture-gallery of incidents from my past life would pass before me, or my imagination would suddenly make a leap to home scenes, and to the employment which I had left for ever. Then I should be hurried involuntarily into an attempt to bring my mind into that state in which I had been taught to consider it proper to await death; fragments of the sermon to which I had just listened, or of others which it suggested, would flash across my brain, and I should be suddenly plunged into vague speculations which at one moment seemed to be strangely chaotic, and at another appeared to afford glimpses into previously hidden mysteries of the universe. Useless I felt them to be, and yet by mere force of habit I fancied that they might be of infinite importance to mankind, and deserving of immediate publication. O. W. Holmes somewhere describes how, as he was sinking into unconsciousness under the influence of chloroform, he conceived himself to be

suddenly inspired with a solution of the dark riddle of the world; he wrote it down, and on coming again to himself found the remarkable sentence 'A strong smell of turpentine prevails throughout.' Perhaps the revelations which came to me were not much more to the purpose, but at the moment they seemed to be of unspeakable insignificance. And then a desperate resolution not to die would overpower all other feeling, till a consciousness that no resolution of mine could work a miracle overwhelmed me again, and a moment's blankness suspended all conscious thought.

Let me try to express more fully some of the wild and tyrannous imaginings that presented themselves, or rather seemed to be presented by some external power. Perhaps I am proving myself to be but a coward at the best. I ought to have been calm and resigned, and, without throwing away a chance of life, to have contemplated death with equanimity. It may be so; and yet I confess that death approaching under such a form strikes me, to say the least, as decidedly unpleasant. Men have died before now in a great variety of ways, and many of them incomparably more terrible. But some more terrible forms of the great enemy are less trying to the nerves. When the Archbishop of Paris was shot the other day, we all admired —and very rightly—the resignation with which he followed the footsteps of his master. When his murderers were shot, and calmly cried 'Vive la Commune!' at the fatal moment, we put it down to wild fanaticism; yet, in both cases, the sufferers did only what has often

been done by many a degraded ruffian with no more symptoms of soul than a brute beast, who simply wished to satisfy such manly instincts as were left in him by dying game. It is life, not death, that is really the difficult business to manage gracefully; and it is but a poor specimen of the breed who cannot go off the stage with a sufficiently good air, so long as there is an audience to applaud. But when you are in absolute solitude, when all your faculties are still in full vigour, when the bitter cup is seen steadily and remorselessly approaching your lips; when the tide is rising inch by inch to overwhelm you in some closed corner, or when, as now, you are only waiting till the strength in your arms is no longer able to counteract the remorseless weight which seems to be dragging you down like an external enemy, then even a brave man has a hard task before him. I claim no more than the amount of courage which decency imperatively demands, and I felt very uncomfortable. But, at any rate, it is a question of confession, not of making an ornamental story. I should have liked to be a model hero or saint; but heroism is sometimes harder than it seems to be in books.

Thus, after the first frantic search for some means of escape, a vision came to me of the conversation which would be taking place in some half-hour or so, just about the time when all conversation would have definitely ceased for me. 'He is late for dinner,' one well-known voice would be saying; and another would be replying by a mild joke which had become a bye-

word amongst our little party, as to my prejudices about soup. It would not be till dinner was over, and tobacco being calmly consumed, that satisfactory excuses would be framed for my absence. I remembered with bitterness a phrase which I had used, as to not waiting dinner for me, which would probably be pressed into the service of the speaker, to suppress all anxiety for the time. When night fell a little uneasiness would spring up, but it would be agreed that I had gone to a neighbouring inn. And not until that hypothesis was slowly exploded by facts would it occur to anyone that it was worth while to go and look for me, for what harm could happen to a tolerable walker in an afternoon's stroll? and meanwhile, just about the time of that facetiousness over the soup, a ghastly mass would be rolled down the flooded stream within a few yards of the inn. I could follow its course in imagination down the deep chasms which the waters of centuries have hewed in the valley below, and thence to the broad river at a day's journey. The remains of men lost in a glacier are restored at a distance of generations, but the torrent is a more remorseless enemy. The disfigured fragments would hardly be worth hunting for. They were not a pleasant object for the imagination to dwell upon. As the lady remarks in Pope—

> One would not, sure, be frightful when one's dead.

And frightful was no word to express an object which—well! I would try to avert my gaze, and then

visions more really appalling would unroll themselves before me. Scenes from old days came back, though by what law they were selected remains unintelligible. Why should I have vividly remembered a certain boyish atrocity—not of specially deep hue, and, indeed, involving nothing more than an average schoolboy falsehood? There had been something mean about it, and it had pricked my conscience at the time, and cost intermittent fits of blushing when accident had recalled it; yet it had long since passed out of the category of memories capable of producing any serious emotion. Yet once more it stood up in its old hideousness; and there, pilloried on a bare rock, and looking forwards to a death approaching by rapid strides, I was positively blushing for a lie told some five-and-twenty years before about eating a forbidden fruit. I have, I fear, committed many less excusable actions since; but this wretched old crime rose up and mocked at me. My conscience, it seems, must have been tender at that early age, and the crime had scarred it so deeply that, under this blinding light of terror, the mark became visible in spite of all the innumerable scratches and cross-hatchings that had been made upon it since. Other recollections rose in countless throngs, of all hues and dimensions; they came from school and college days, and from maturer life; old scenes of friendship or of danger, of triumphs and disappointments, whirled confusedly before me; but running through them all, like a recurring cadence in a piece of music, was this detestable little memory which seemed resolved to exact

the fullest expiation possible in the time. Perhaps after all it may have been of more importance than it seemed, and the mind have been really roused to clairvoyance by the extremity of its tension. And then would intrude another vision more awful by far: for an instant I seemed to see through the remorseless crags that closed me in, and far away, by a quiet shore and under a beautiful sky, I could see some whom I loved—but that way, I could still say with a desperate effort, madness lies; and, with a fierce wrench of the faculties, I turned back to the less appalling realities of the situation.

A puff of wind had driven aside the wreaths of mist; and high above me I could see towering into the gloomy skies a pinnacle of black rock. Sharp and needle-like it sprang from its cloud-hidden base, and scarcely a flake of snow clung to its terrible precipices. Only a day or two before I had been lounging in the inn garden during a delusive sunset gleam of bright weather, and admiring its noble proportions. I had been discussing with my friends the best mode of assaulting its hitherto untrodden summit, on which we had facetiously conferred the name of Teufelshorn. Lighted up by the Alpine glow, it seemed to beckon us upward, and had fired all my mountaineering zeal. Now, though it was not a time for freaks of fancy, it looked like a grim fiend calmly frowning upon my agony. I hated it, and yet had an unpleasant sense that my hatred could do it no harm. If I could have lightened and thundered, its rocks would have come

down with a crash; but it stood immovable, scornful, and eternal. There is a poetry in the great mountains, but the poetry may be stern as well as benevolent. If, to the weary Londoner, they speak of fresh air and healthful exercise and exciting adventure, they can look tyrannous and forbidding enough to the peasant on whose fields they void their rheum—as Shakespeare pleasantly puts it—or to the luckless wretch who is clinging in useless supplication at their feet. Grim and fierce, like some primeval giant, that peak looked to me, and for a time the whole doctrine preached by the modern worshippers of sublime scenery seemed inexpressibly absurd and out of place.

The reflection brought back the recollection of my friends who were about this time thinking of washing their hands for dinner. What would my respectable friend the clergyman say to it all? He was as little a bigot as most men; but could he resist so tempting an occasion of pointing a professional moral? Just before my slip I had been amusing myself by the reflection that an accident on Sunday afternoon, when all respectable persons were attending divine service, would come very well into a sermon. Now, for an instant, I heard and saw my friend in the pulpit, really touched by the sudden disappearance, almost as it were from before his face, of a fellow-creature; and anxious to say nothing to injure proper susceptibilities, and yet unable to avoid just hinting in the most delicate way in the world at the singular coincidence Of course,

after the fashion of his kind, he would decline to say that it was more than a coincidence. People of good taste have given up dealing in providential judgments in particular cases. Perhaps it is because they do not believe in them; but that is no reason why they should not hold them out as topics for pious consolation to those who do; and therefore the preacher, with a certain half-conscious complacency, would hint that though Providence had not actually tumbled me off the rock, it had possibly arranged matters with a view to Christian edification.

The thought suggested a whole train of more serious reflections. Was I, in fact, going decorously through that process which I had been accustomed to hear mentioned in sacred edifices as preparation for death? When the Emperor Maximilian was hanging to the cliff above Innsbruck, the people gathered below to watch for his fall; and the priests held up the host for his edification, and went through the proper performance for the consolation of a man in his last moments. Doubtless it was a satisfaction to the Emperor. He had been drilled for many years to go through the ceremony, and though it was not as pleasant as a coronation, I have no doubt that, as a brave man, or even as a coward, he would bring his mind into the proper frame. If I had been there—Protestant as I am by education, and inclined to free-thinking by nature—I don't think I should have proposed to enter into a controversy with him on the

moment, and prove that the consecrated wafer was nothing more than a bit of bread. A great many excellent persons would, I know, have done so, and I should highly respect their motives—amongst others perhaps, a friend of mine, who once proposed an ingenious scheme for saving drowning men, which began by distracting their attention from the water. When, however, a human being has any charm or accustomed formula which steadies his faculties at so awful a moment, perhaps it is as well not to snatch it from him too hastily. In such mental storms the intellect has for the time abdicated its functions, and the emotions propel a man along what mathematicians would call the line of least resistance. He adopts the accustomed formula just because it is accustomed. If he has been trained to use the words of religious resignation, they come easiest to him, and he uses them, and the bystanders admire his marvellous constancy of mind. It may indicate courage, but it may also indicate the survival of an instinct after all power of external self-guidance has departed. Bewildered, distracted, and for all practical purposes insane, he goes automatically through the performance which costs the least effort of reflection. But for me, unluckily or the reverse, no such formula was provided. A soldier, utterly beside himself in a forlorn hope, hears the word of command and obeys it, because it is easier than the exertion of independent will enough to run away. He is a hero out of sheer cowardice.

Napier tells a story of an officer who, at a critical moment, lay down behind a hedge, and whom no insults or exhortations could stir to show a touch of manly spirit. The same man, he adds, was a noted duellist, and met death soon afterwards under most appalling circumstances with a courage and coolness which astonished all beholders. Such apparent contradictions are common enough, and cannot always be explained. But probably it was not the danger but the responsibility that unmanned him in the battle; it was the necessity of going back to first principles and reasoning coolly under fire when none of the accustomed formulæ were ready at hand. My case was something similar. No cut and dried line of thought presented itself. My mind had been perplexed by infinite tracts, and sermons, and controversial papers, and the result was a drifting chaos of precedents, which whirled madly through my head without presenting any distinct result. I asked myself, as every true Briton would ask himself, what was the correct and gentlemanlike thing to do under the circumstances; but no leading case started up spontaneously for my guidance. I was thrown back upon that most important of all questions, which we generally avoid so dexterously. What is this universe in which we live, and what is therefore the part we should play in it? I had, perhaps, a quarter of an hour left in which to answer that question and a few others. Philosophers had wasted lives upon it, and my own previous

speculations had not entirely settled the point. We are content to live in this world from hand to mouth, and to divert ourselves at each moment by the little signposts that previous authorities have set up, instead of referring to any general map of the world. Here, however, there was no signpost; or rather a distracting mass of signposts, each saying in its own language, 'This is the way to heaven,' seemed to dance before my imagination. To reason was of course impossible; but with a rapidity unknown at other moments, each alternative seemed to embody itself in concrete form. Forgotten frames of mind reproduced themselves in quick succession and in a brief space. I had retraced stages of intellectual development through which I had passed in former days. The world seemed scarcely real—except so far as pain and anxiety were real—but a shifting phantasmagoria, in which all earthly objects arrayed themselves in succession on the basis laid down by Protestants, Catholics, Epicureans, Positivists, Broad Churchmen, Pantheists, and a vast variety of sects. I looked as it were through the glasses provided by St. Paul, Spinoza, Marcus Aurelius, Dr. Newman, Epicurus, Comte, Thomas à Kempis, Luther, Dr. Cumming, and others, and tried which best suited my frame of mind. The world seemed at one moment a mere anteroom to heaven and hell; at another to be the whole accessible universe; at one moment this life was merely the first chapter of a story to be continued in an infinite series, and my

soul an indestructible living essence, whose misery or happiness was of unspeakable importance; at another I found myself only as one amongst the countless multitudes of animalculæ which are crushed finally out of existence when you boil a kettle of London water. In passing through the forest above, I had, from sheer wantonness, struck my stick into a huge ant-heap, and perhaps slain half-a-dozen patriotic six-legged citizens. Was my death of any more real importance than theirs? A sort of half grotesque sorrow that I had not let them alone just passed through my mind at the thought, though I cannot say that the reflection added materially to my mental sufferings. But of the thoughts which occurred to me I may say generally that I do not report them as creditable or orthodox, but merely as characteristic of a mind without fixed principles.

Some of these shifting visions, it must be added, made themselves felt even at the time as mere freaks of fancy. Those, for example, for which the sermon on the Athanasian Creed had probably served as a nucleus, excited what under other circumstances would have been a sense of the ludicrous; seen through an atmosphere of horror, it became fearfully grotesque. Everyone has read Jean Paul's grand vision of the soul waking up to find a godless world. A belief in immortality without a belief in a God is a fantastic combination of opinion which could only be used for imaginative purposes. To me, though I seemed to be

sounding all kinds of speculative depths and swaying from one creed to another through almost untrodden regions of thought, that awful dream never occurred. But, for an instant, a more hideous fancy presented itself. I contemplated the possibility of awakening to find not that the highest doctrines of theology were false, but that all its doctrines were true. I imagined a deity—for it would be profane to use in such a connection the holiest word of human language—proclaiming to us miserable sinners, 'Yes! it is all true! Every ghastly dream which the imagination of priests and prophets and holy writers has conjured up is, as they told you, but a faint image of the reality. You, and countless millions more like you, have been what you called good fellows; you have paid your bills, been faithful to your wives, tolerably kind to your children, and on the whole enjoyed life and kept on the blind side of human justice. But you have not provided yourself with the proper passport; you have wickedly left out a clause in the Athanasian Creed; and you cannot plead "invincible ignorance," because you asserted, without due examination, that the whole composition—whoever wrote it—was presumptuous nonsense. Ten minutes' more thought might have saved you. As it is, you shall be burnt for ever and ever with the Devil in hell.'

That ghastly nightmare, as I have said, only flashed on my mind from some storehouse of dim childish ancies, and vanished like a bubble. Indeed, it would

be but a grotesque caricature of what anyone now believes. It represents only what they occasionally say. Real belief in such doctrines has gone out with a belief in a horned, hoofed, and goggle-eyed devil. Probably the last genuine believer died at about the same time as old Dolly Pentreath, the last person who spoke Cornish. Perhaps it was Jonathan Edwards, who brought himself to take pleasure in thinking of the sufferings of the damned, by way of a creditable spiritual feat; but to entertain it permanently implied the regular use of powerful stimulants, such as the burning of heretics. Persecution is, doubtless, a most powerful agent for producing conviction—in the persecutor; but even the unchangeable and infallible Church is beginning to be shy of its old theories. We have naturally come to think of Auld Nickie-Ben from Burns's point of view with something like kindness, as a now harmless monster. And so I had the satisfaction of thinking that the Devil, at any rate, was not likely to meet me in the course of the afternoon; and that the institution, which was abolished by Lord Westbury, had pretty nearly extinguished its fires before he had finally quenched them within the borders of the Church of England.

Such hideous phantasms no longer haunt the daylight; and I had reason to rejoice that they could not revive to torture my last moments. Yet the frame of mind to which they were congenial is not, as probably it never will be, extinct. And surely it was a time,

if not for colouring the whole universe with horror, at least for weaning myself from the present world. It is surely consoling to revile what one is forced to leave; and theologians have provided a whole armoury of appropriate terms of abuse. The world, they tell us, is a scene of misery and revolt against the Divine will; human nature is corrupt; the heart of man is deceitful and desperately wicked; nay, the animal creation is an appalling gulf of apparently aimless evil. Such words, though they now run glibly enough from the mouths of popular preachers, were once the cry of anguish of noble natures; they were the expression of the revolt of the pure and gentle against dominant sensuality and tyranny of brute force; though couched in the language of humility, they really testified to the elevation of minds goaded by a sense of evils, which only hardened coarser natures into an exaggerated repudiation of the existing order. Was not my position calculated to give them fresh meaning? There was I, an involuntary Stylites, cut off from my kind, with black rocks frowning above me and the pitiless chasm beneath. No angelic vision was required to announce my approaching fate. Death was coming with all but visible strides. Nature looked savage enough, marking my sufferings with contemptuous indifference. Seen through the mist of despair that was beginning to cloud my imagination, was it not easy to regard the world through the eyes of some old hermit expiring in the solitudes of the desert? I am not much of an optimist at the

best of times, and it was easy to paint man and nature in the darkest of tints. War, pauperism, stupidity in high places, hypocrisy in those which are called holy, cowardice, cruelty, ignorance, and general disorganisation of the very framework of society; are not these things common enough to enable one to part from the world without any bitter regret? Why not fold my arms, shut my eyes, and pass contentedly from this distracted chaos, from which faith has disappeared and order is dissolving, to—whither? That unfortunately is the question. We—for I need not confine myself to the singular—are less troubled to know what dreams may come, than whether there will be any dreams. All respectable persons profess to believe in a future, but it is a singularly vague one. No visible angels beckon to us with golden crowns, and all we know of what the blessed do above is that if they sing and love, they do it under conditions so unimaginable that the words become little more than empty syllables. The spontaneous imagination of mankind, when it is not forced to run in orthodox directions, reflects our real beliefs in the superstitions miscalled spiritualist. Suppose that after the crash I should find myself rapping in a mahogany table? Would not annihilation be preferable? Our hopes and fears are too shadowy to be grasped with much satisfaction, even when the material world is fading from our view. But another difficulty was really more invincible. The instinctive feeling remained that I would not die with a lie on my lips.

A certain disposition to object to gratuitous falsehood was the only virtue on which I had much been in the habit of priding myself; and I could not tell a more direct lie than by professing disgust of the world. It always had seemed to me a very fair sort of place as worlds go. I had regarded the dogmas about the corruption of our nature and the vileness of humanity as amongst those from which every spark of vitality had most completely departed. I never heard a congregation describe itself as composed of miserable sinners without a longing to contradict it flatly. 'You are very decent people,' I wished to say, 'and your hearts are not bad organs in their way, though your brains might be a trifle more active. You are mechanically repeating fragments of an old melody from which all sense has departed.' My sponsors, I fear, were very officious in renouncing for me a world which I love with all my heart. Up to that luckless step I intended to enjoy it to the full. My digestion was in good order; and it was only at moments of accidental disorder that I could agree with Pascal, or humble myself after the pattern of à Kempis. I had meant to marry and have children, and make a decent income, and—if it may be said without offence—to drink my share of wine and enjoy good books, good cookery, and good pictures. Nay, I fancied that I might do my share of work, and leave the world a trifle better than I found it. I make no pretensions to be a hero, yet I should not think such a life incompatible with heroism. For

heroism is measured by the strength of the passion which animates a man to great deeds, and not by the miseries to which it may accidentally expose him. However that may be, the world never looked more attractive to me than from that perilous ledge, nor did the commonplaces about the worthlessness of this life, and the disadvantages of setting one's affections on things below, ever seem more unreal. The danger of eternal damnation for neglect of dogmatic theology scarcely seemed more chimerical than the danger of damnation for being an average Englishman. Long training on cold water and bread with a due allowance of scourgings, may train a saint to regard death as a relief from a bed of hardships; but the old man, as a Puritan would say, was still strong within me, and threatened to stick by me till that last plunge through the air. The advice to curse God and die came to Job from a very questionable quarter, and, for my part, I would not curse even the world from which our conceptions of the Divine nature must be derived.

Another and a manlier doctrine was at hand. The Christian phraseology which has served to express the emotions of so many races and ages, has naturally become plastic. It lends itself no better to the ascetic than to the jovial preacher who avows and justifies his love for 'women, wine, and song.' The Christian may regard creation not as groaning under a curse, but as the favoured garden of the Lord; the heathen gods need not be devils in disguise, but dim reflec-

tions of the true Divinity; and the flesh, instead of being a deadly enemy to be trampled under foot, may be a serviceable ally, only requiring good athletic training. The preachers of this doctrine somehow extenuate damnation till it need not shock the tenderest nerves; and make out that the corruption of mankind, so permanent a dogma in orthodox sermons, is only a biblical way of stating Mr. Darwin's doctrines. Their shibboleth consists in prefixing to every natural object the possessive case of the Divine name, and in seeing proof of paternal benevolence through every corner of the universe. If in inferior hands, the doctrine takes a rather unctuous tone of almost rollicking optimism, and rather exalts the flesh above the spirit, it must yet be granted that were it not in some sense a reflection of the truth, all sunshine would die off the face of the universe. But was it available at this moment? Could I take this cheerful view of my fate? If the leap that had been set for me was arranged by paternal kindness, the mode in which the kindness was manifested was, to say the least, mysterious. In that, indeed, there could be no difficulty. The newspaper correspondents below had found in the depth of men's ignorance a perfectly satisfactory reason for expecting no specific answer to prayer. 'If you want to work a miracle,' was the prayer of a simple American in a position somewhat similar to mine, 'now's your time!' I was too sophisticated for such an expression of faith. I should not have ex-

pected a white-winged messenger from above to reach me a hand—however convenient it would have been —partly because I never expected to work miracles, and partly because, for anything I could say, the messenger might have been better employed. Who can say positively that it would not be better for the world at large if his neck were wrung five minutes hence? Honest men before now have worked more mischief than knaves by reason of their honesty. For my part, though prepared to defend my life against individuals, I could suggest many reasons why a general tribunal of the universe should be glad to get rid of me. The murderer and thief who, in Parnell's fable, steals gold, and strangles babies, and drowns men, turns out to be a masquerading angel, and gives excellent reasons for his apparent eccentricities to his perplexed companion. Doubtless an angel who had tripped me up would justify himself—to an impartial observer—as easily as I would justify the shooting of a wolf, or the slaughter of a sheep. But then there is a painful ambiguity in these arguments from mystery. What is there behind the cloud? Is it pure love and care for individuals? According to Butler, 'we make very free with Divine goodness in our speculations;' it is by no means 'a bare single disposition to produce happiness;' and with somewhat amazing calmness he asserts, after proving that the world is designed as a probationary state for the exercise of virtue, that to most men it proves a discipline of vice. The Divine laboratory, in

other words, turns out more refuse than pure ore, and the destination of the refuse is unpleasant to contemplate. And even if the old theological dialect be wrong, do not men of science fall in with this view? Mr. Herbert Spencer pleasantly disperses our dreams of universal benevolence of design by the case of the loathsome parasites which torture, and, so far as we can tell, purposely torture the nobler organisms. If the Divine goodness has made vile insects to burrow in my tissues, can I be sure that my private convenience has been much consulted in the arrangements of this universe? Doubtless it is pleasant to believe otherwise with the immortal Pangloss, as with modern divines of the cheerful school. It would be pleasant to believe that I should escape from my rock, that a grateful country would present me to-morrow with 10,000*l.* a year, and my works be read on every table in England and America. But our wishes are no logical support, though they are often enough the real cause of our belief in their fulfilment. Is it so sure that the solution of the great enigma is a pleasant one? In one form or other, does not some dark misgiving underlie all our schemes, orthodox and otherwise? Can we quite get rid of hell? Or if that is banished as an idle dream, can I still hope for any kind of heaven? Will every man's single account be made to balance, or only the whole sum? May I not be part of the refuse of the universe, a grain of the dust crushed and comminuted by the working of

the gigantic machinery, thrown aside with superb indifference, and compensated neither here nor hereafter? That is what the orthodox would think of a flea; and in the presence of Infinity, what is the difference between a man and a flea? We are all like the unlucky victims in Poe's story of the Inquisition. The walls are remorselessly closing upon us; and with all our doublings, and turnings, and efforts, to see things in a different light, the same ghastly phantom of doubt haunts all creeds. It is transformed, not annihilated.

From such comfortless thoughts I would occasionally, by a natural reaction, seek relief elsewhere. Let the universe take care of itself, and let me come to hard, tangible, unmistakeable facts. I am, whatever else I may be, so much flesh and bones, worked by a certain amount of vital force; a machine, with food for fuel, grinding out so much thought, motion, and producing sundry chemical and mechanical changes in surrounding objects. In half an hour more the material will be dispersed, and the forces transformed, for neither can be lost. What was me will be part of the glacier stream, or increasing the deposits on the flanks of the mountains. The forces that once digested food will be producing mere ferment in inanimate masses, and those which secreted thought will be helping, it may be, to curl the mists through the gorges. There are no hopes and no fears for the future, and I may take such comfort as I can in the

reflection that I, if I and my body are identical, am still part of the bigger thing which we call nature. I have known people who have professed to take pleasure in such contemplations; for my own part, I confess that I felt as little interest in the probability of my limbs being worked up like old paper into a new product as in the fate of last year's clippings from my hair or parings of my nails. The various bits of matter that have formed part of my system become supremely uninteresting to me when disconnected from influence on my consciousness. Materialism of this brutal variety at least has not yet produced any formula which is very serviceable under such circumstances as mine. To take it into one's mind is to knock one's head in imagination against a blank wall, and therefore not precisely exhilarating. And yet it may possibly help to a thought expressed in the nobler systems which are sometimes libellously described as materialist. The essence of religion consists, according to some thinkers, in depressing individualism. Why should we take such a keen interest in ourselves? Is not heaven merely a device for protracting our selfishness beyond the grave? Why not seek comfort in the Pantheist view? Death, let us say, is merely the process by which the little barriers of personality are broken down and we are absorbed into the world of spirit. We are such stuff as dreams are made of, and our little lives are not worth caring for. As Omar

Khayyam puts it in one of the most impressive poems ever written—

> The eternal Saki from his bowl has poured,
> Millions of bubbles like us, and shall pour.

When the bubble bursts we melt into the great abyss of existence. Earthly limitations are removed, and why should we regret so paltry a thing as that which we call life? Or let me try to take the recipe by which our positivist teachers would obliterate selfishness. Think of myself as a mere atom in the great current of humanity, a drop in the vast river whose end and origin are alike hidden in a mist which it is impossible to penetrate. Give up the dream which tries to displace, as it were, the centre of gravity of the universe, and to find a fixed shore beyond the boundless ocean. It is all, let me say, a delusion. The only reality is here, though I seek to discover it in an imaginary world. All my efforts to transcend the region of experience break down as surely as the efforts of a bird to soar above the universe. Grasp the sensible and abandon the delusive mirage, which is really but a reflection in my mind of what I see around me. Let me see what comfort such a thought can give me. Let me reflect that I have been an infinitesimal agent in the progress of humanity. For the visionary future let me substitute the future of mankind. I shall die and be forgotten; but my work will live. The impulse that has been transmitted through me will be propagated onwards indefinitely.

Progress—that excellent if rather vague entity—will continue. The world will go on getting a little better. The old strain of ferocity will die out, and the influences of civilisation percolate to the furthest corners of the masses. The Social Science Association will gradually extend its soporific influence over the face of the world. There will be a thorough system of drainage, and reading and writing will be universal. Everybody will have a vote, and nobody will know how his neighbour has voted. Instead of cutting each other's throats, we shall cheat each other before an international tribunal. Each man will become exactly like his neighbour, and women be undistinguishable from men. Everything will be exquisitely quiet, respectable, and humdrum. Theology, now flickering, will go out, and we shall resign ourselves to the darkness. Perhaps, indeed, the old models will be more or less restored under a new and different name. We shall have a Pope, only in Paris instead of Rome, and he will preach scientific instead of theological dogmas. Providence will be superseded by the 'three bankers' of the future; and the ancient temples and worship will arise from their ashes, with the trifling omission of belief in a deity. Whether such doctrines be true or false, they may, for anything I know, supply the groundwork of the poetry and the religious aspirations of the future. A positivist, or a negativist, or a materialist may find some utterance for his emotions in the dialect of his sect; he may put together some

kind of raft to support him sufficiently through the stormy passage of life. At present the edifice of his faith looks bleak and bare enough, and is to the older creeds what a contractor's row in London is to a venerable cathedral; but it may be that when the scaffolding is removed, and associations have begun to gather round its walls, it will be a little more comforting to the naked and weary soul. It is the proper thing to recognise the good in everything—even in lying, and much more in a faith which errs, if it errs at all, by excess of candour. Nor is it proper, though it is very tempting, to sneer at the prospect held out to us. The new heaven, which is to be of this world and for the good of our descendants instead of ourselves, may not be very attractive; but let us not deny that there is some progress that way. It is the worst kind of scepticism to disbelieve in man. Only one may safely assume that the contemplation is not at present calculated to produce a vehement enthusiasm. I did not, at any rate, find myself rapt into a seventh heaven of exaltation, from which such petty troubles as smashing my skull and stopping the action of my heart seemed insignificant trifles. The top of Pisgah is more difficult of access than the Matterhorn, and the view of the promised land is apt to be hazy. Perhaps we are better than our ancestors; war is not so savage as in the Roman days; our bishops may be an improvement on the pagan pontiffs, and our modern revolutionists superior to the early Christians. I am not very well

read in history, and I could not say dogmatically. But, at all events, the attitude in which one looks upon modern developments is one of hoping against hope, and trusting doggedly that some deeper current underlies the superficial eddies. New forms of physical disease and of social corruption are generated as certainly as old grievances are removed and old superstitions exploded. The world is somehow egged forwards rather than backwards by the efforts of a chaotic crowd of stupid people, each shoving blindly towards his own point of the compass; those who accidentally push the right way are generally as dull as their neighbours, and one is often forced to say that but for the reformers one would be in favour of reform. Is the satisfaction of having taken part in this confused scramble any compensation for the loss of all private hopes and ambitions? We can understand the soldier dying cheerfully when he knows that he has struck a good blow or two on the right side; but the sense that one has done a little mischief in this Donnybrook fair of a world is not very consoling, even if you feel that your own faction is probably getting rather the best of it. Humanity will blunder on pretty much as it did before; there will be a skirmisher the less in the great battle, and his place will probably be filled by a better man; and meanwhile the loss to the sufferer personally is unmistakable. Perhaps it is conceivable that a youthful enthusiast might die happy in the thought that he had added a new clause to the Ballot

Bill, and so helped the onward march of the world. The belief that clauses in bills, or speeches, or sermons, or even leading articles, do an appreciable amount of good is not very strong in me; and I cannot affect to think that I have been more to the world than an ant to a mountain. We have both, it may be, cleared away a little rubbish—a dead caterpillar or an outlying bit of humbug—but I could not soothe myself with thoughts of a 'subjective immortality' in the bosoms of the faithful. Humanity was too big and distant, and too indistinctly related to me, to lift me for one minute above the sense of that awful personal crash which was approaching so speedily. It was selfish, it may be; and our positivists promise to drill all that alloy out of us in time; but I confess that the lively interest which I take in my own welfare and that of a few relatives somehow prevented my imagination from soaring to those empyrean heights whence all things would be seen in their true relations and my own insignificance be realised. And, somehow or other, one element of consolation seemed to be wanting; what is that instinct which seems to require something like a blessing to soothe the parting moment —some sense of sanctification to soften the harsh edges of hideous facts? What is blessing, and what is meant by sanctifying? Does the sentiment correspond to an instinct surviving from an antiquated stage of thought or to one lying in the deepest groundwork of human nature? If too shadowy to grasp distinctly, it

is not the less patent, and at present, rightly or wrongly, I did not feel as though the sacraments administered by a high priest of humanity would do me much good. I should not shrink from him as from a bit of diabolical witchcraft, but perhaps I should be just a little inclined to laugh in the face of the minis-trant. If Maximilian's priest would be no comfort to me, he was trying to satisfy a feeling for which a satisfactory expression has not yet been found; his opiate has lost its power, but where is the new one?

From these and from other variations on the same theme no particular comfort came, as indeed was hardly to be expected. Indeed, to be candid, I suspect that a believer in any creed would have been highly uncomfortable in my position. The one suggestion which was of some sort of use came from a different and a very undignified source. Years ago I had rowed and lost a race or two on the Thames, and there was a certain similarity in the situations, for there comes a time in a losing race when all hope has departed, and one is labouring simply from some obscure sense of honour. The sinews of the arms are splitting, the back aches, and the lungs feel as though every blood-vessel in them were strained almost to bursting point. Whatever vital force is left is absorbed in propelling the animal machine; no reason can be distinctly given for continuing a process painful in a high degree, dangerous to the constitution, and capable of producing no sort of good result; and yet one continues to toil

as though life and happiness depended upon refraining from a moment's intermission, and, as it were, nails one's mind—such as is left—down to the task. Even so the effort to maintain my grasp on the rock became to me the one absorbing thought; this fag end of the game should be fairly played out, come what might, and whatever reasons might be given for it.

It was becoming tempting to throw up the cards and have done with it. Even the short sharp pang of the crash on the rocks below seemed preferable to draining the last dregs of misery. And yet, stupidly or sensibly, my mind fixed itself on at least holding out against time, and discharging what seemed to be a kind of duty. All other motives were rapidly fading from me, and one theory of the universe seemed to be about as uninteresting as another. The play should be played out, and as well as it could be done. Yet, before the end, I gave one more frantic glance at the position, and suddenly, to my utter astonishment, a new chance revealed itself. Could I grasp a certain projection which I now observed for the first time, I might still have a chance of escape. But to gain it, it was necessary to relax my hold with the right hand, and make a slight spring upwards. If the plan had occurred to me at the first moment, it might not have been difficult. But my strength had ebbed so far that success was exceedingly doubtful. Still it was the one chance, and at worst woul hasten the crisis. I gathered myself up, crouching as low as I dared, and

then springing from the right foot, and aiding the spring with my left hand, I threw out my right at the little jutting point. The tips of my fingers just reached their aim, but only touched without anchoring themselves. As I fell back, my foot missed its former support, and my whole weight came heavily on the feeble left hand. The clutch was instantaneously torn apart, and I was falling through the air. The old flash of surprise crossed my mind, tempered by something like a sense of relief. All was over! The mountains sprang upwards with a bound. But before the fall had well begun, before the air had begun to whistle past me, my movement was arrested. With a shock of surprise I found myself lying on a broad bed of deep moss, as comfortably as in my bed at home. As my bewildered senses righted themselves, I understood it all. The facts were simple and rather provoking. Before attempting the passage across the rock-face, I had noted, though without much conscious attention, that beneath my narrow ledge there was a broader one, some ten feet lower down. The sudden alarm produced by the slip, whilst reviving so much else, had expunged this one practically useful memory completely and instantaneously. But now, as it came back to me, I easily convinced myself not only that I had never been in danger, and thus that all my agony had been thrown away, but that I had never even done anything rash. It was rather humiliating, but decidedly consoling, and in some sense comforting to

my self-esteem. As I slowly picked myself up, I looked at my watch. It followed, from a comparison of times, that I had not been stretched on the rack for more than five minutes. Besides the obvious reflection that in such moments one lives fast, it also followed that I might still be in time for dinner. I got on my legs, trembling at first, but soon found that they could carry me as fast as usual down the well-known path. I was in time to join my friends at the *table d'hôte*, joined in the usual facetiousness about the soup, and spent the evening—for the clouds were now rolling away—in discussing the best mode of assaulting our old friend the *Teufelshorn*.

*** It may be as well to say, for the credit of the noble science of mountaineering, that the foregoing narrative is without even a foundation in fact.

CHAPTER VI.

SHAFTESBURY'S 'CHARACTERISTICS.'[1]

THE third Lord Shaftesbury is one of the many writers who enjoy a kind of suspended vitality. His volumes are allowed to slumber peacefully on the shelves of dusty libraries till some curious student of English literature takes them down for a cursory perusal. Though generally mentioned respectfully, he has been dragged deeper into oblivion by two or three heavy weights. Besides certain intrinsic faults of style to be presently noticed, he has been partly injured by the evil reputation which he shares with the English Deists. Their orthodox opponents succeeded in inflicting upon those writers a fate worse than refutation. The Deists were not only pilloried for their heterodoxy, but indelibly branded with the fatal inscription 'dulness.' The charge, to say the truth, was not ill-deserved; and though Shaftesbury is in many respects a writer of a higher order than Toland, Tindal, or Collins, he cannot be acquitted of

[1] 'Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times.' By the Right Hon. Anthony Earl of Shaftesbury. 3rd edit., 1723.

that most heinous of literary offences. Attempts, however, have lately been made to resuscitate him. His works have recently been republished in England, and a vigorous German author, Dr. Spicker, has appealed against the verdict which would consign him finally to the worms and the moths. To an English student there is something rather surprising, and not a little flattering, in this German enthusiasm. We are astonished to see how much can be elicited by dexterous hands from these almost forgotten volumes. A countryman of Kant and Hegel, and one, too, familiar with the intricacies of that portentous philosophical literature which Englishmen, even whilst they sneer, regard for the most part with mysterious awe, can still discover lessons worth studying in a second-rate English author of Queen Anne's time. To understand him properly, it is necessary, in Dr. Spicker's judgment (so, at least, we may infer from the form of his book), to cast a preliminary glance over the history of religion and philosophy, to study the views of Paul and Aquinas, and Kant and Spinoza, and Schleiermacher and Strauss, and to plunge into speculations about the soul, about being and non-being, and the proofs of the existence of God and a future life. When thus duly prepared, we may form an estimate of Shaftesbury's writings, and then we may draw certain conclusions as to the nature of the Hebrew genius, the true use of the Bible, the difference between the ideal and the historical Christ,

the religious problems of the future, and the Archimedean point of philosophy. We need not follow Dr. Spicker's reflections upon these deep topics. We may, perhaps, feel a certain giddiness when we see so many reflections evolved from so comparatively trifling a source. We resemble the fisherman in the 'Arabian Nights'; we have been keeping our genie locked up between his smoke-dried covers; and behold! at the touch of this magician's hand, he rises in a vast cloud of philosophy till his head reaches the skies and his shadow covers the earth. Would not Shaftesbury, we are apt to ask, have been rather surprised had he known what boundless potentialities of speculation were germinating in his pages? May not his German commentator, indeed, be slily laughing at us in his sleeve, and making of poor Shaftesbury a mere stalking-horse, under whose cover to bring down game whose very existence was unsuspected by his author? In fact, it seems probable that on some occasions Dr. Spicker has confused a little the treasures which he found with those which he brought. He has given additional fulness of meaning to Shaftesbury's vague hints and inconclusive snatches at thought; and though he may be personally conscious of the difference between the germ and the full development, his readers may find it difficult to detect the real Shaftesbury thus overlaid with modern theory. Yet Dr. Spicker brings high authorities for attributing some greater value to Shaftesbury than we

generally allow. Hettner, for example, calls him one of the most important literary phenomena of the eighteenth century. Not only the English, he says, but all the greatest minds of the period—Leibnitz, Voltaire, Diderot, Lessing, Mendelssohn, Wieland, and Herder—drew the richest nourishment from his pages; and he extends to all his writings Herder's enthusiastic description of 'The Moralists' as a dialogue almost worthy of Grecian antiquity in form, and far superior to it in contents. Have we, indeed, been entertaining an angel unawares? Dr. Spicker, of course, quotes the old example of Shakespeare, and once more assures us that we never recognised the value of our national poet until his significance was fully revealed to us by German critics. There is, however, a marked difference between the cases. Shakespeare, though our German friends may choose to forget it, was the object of our national adoration long before he became the idol of the whole world. Our enthusiasm was almost as unqualified in the days of Garrick and Johnson as now, and Pope reveals what was the popular creed even in his day, when he speaks of

> Shakespeare, whom you and every playhouse bill
> Style the divine, the matchless, what you will.

The Germans did not originate our faith; they enabled us, at most, to give a reason for it. But if Shaftesbury is to be raised to a lofty place in our Walhalla, the enthusiasm has to be created as well as

explained. In such questions the *vox populi* is very nearly infallible. When critics declare that an author does not deserve the neglect which he receives, the admission of the fact is generally more significant than the protest. When, as sometimes happens, we find a man being still refuted a century after his death, we may be pretty sure that he said something worth notice; and, inversely, when we find that nobody cares to refute him, it is tolerably safe to assume that he had no genuine vitality.

In considering, however, the value of this appeal against the verdict of posterity, we must admit that there are certain reasons, besides Shaftesbury's intrinsic want of merit, which may account in some measure for his neglect. They are reasons, too, which are more likely to repel a native than a foreign reader. The feeling of annoyance which generally causes a student to put down the 'Characteristics' with a certain impatience is more or less due to defects which would be less perceptible to a German, especially to a German endowed with the national robustness of literary appetite. Shaftesbury suffered under two delusions, which are unfortunately very common amongst authors. He believed himself to possess a sense of humour and a specially fine critical taste. Whenever he tries to be facetious he is intolerable; he reminds one of that painful jocosity which is sometimes assumed by a grave professor, who fancies, with perfect truth, that his audience is in-

clined to yawn, and argues, in most unfortunate conflict with the truth, that such heavy gambols as he can manage will rouse them to the smiling point. The result is generally depressing. Yet Shaftesbury is less annoying when he is writhing his grave face into a contorted grimace than when the muse, whom he is in the habit of invoking, permits him to get upon stilts. His rhapsodies then are truly dismal, though they are probably improved when they are translated into German. One awkward peculiarity must disappear in the process. His prose, at excited moments, becomes a kind of breccia of blank verse. Bishop Berkeley ridicules him by printing a fragment of the 'Soliloquy' in this form; and by leaving out a word or two at intervals it does, in fact, very fairly represent the metre which did duty for blank verse in the reign of Dryden and Pope. Here, for example, is a fragment taken pretty much at random from 'The Moralists'—'Or shall we mind the poets when they sing thy tragedy, Prometheus, who with thy stol'n celestial fire, mixed with vile clay, didst mock heaven's countenance, and in abusive likeness of the immortals madest the compound man, that wretched mortal, ill to himself and cause of ill to all?' No English critic can witness his native language tortured into this hideous parody of verse without disgust. Shaftesbury's classicism too often reminds us of the contemporary statues in which George I. and his like appear masquerading in the costumes of Roman

emperors. His English prose is to the magnificent roll and varied cadences of Jeremy Taylor, or Milton, or Sir Thomas Browne, what Congreve's versification in the 'Mourning Bride' is to the exquisite melody of Massinger, Fletcher, or Shakespeare. No philosophising can persuade us out of our ears, and Shaftesbury's mouthing is simply detestable. The phenomenon is the more curious when we remember that he prided himself on his exquisite taste, and was a contemporary of Swift and Addison. But the defect goes much deeper than is indicated by these occasional lapses into a kind of disjointed ambling. Herder, as we have seen, admires his 'Platonic Dialogues': we prefer the judgment of Mackintosh, a favourable critic, who admits his performance to be 'heavy and languid,' and we may add that the excuse made for him on the ground that modern manners are unsuitable to this form of composition must be balanced by the recollection that, in spite of these difficulties, Berkeley was almost at the same time composing dialogues which are amongst the most perfect modern examples of the style. The difference between the two, from a purely artistic point of view, is as great in all other respects as is the difference between Shaftesbury's lumbering phraseology and Berkeley's admirably lucid English. Shaftesbury's desire to affect a certain gentlemanlike levity, and to avoid a pedantic adherence to system, makes him a singularly difficult writer to follow. He is never content with expressing his meaning plainly

and directly. It must be introduced to us with all manner of affected airs and graces; the different parts of his argument, instead of being fitted into a logical framework, must be separated by discursive remarks upon things in general; they must be made acceptable by a plentiful effusion of rhetoric; we must be amused by digressions and covert allusions, and be seduced into our conclusions by ingeniously contrived and roundabout methods of approaching the subject. A skilful writer of a dialogue conceals his plan but never forgets it; and if it be stripped of the external form, we find beneath a sinewy and well-compacted system of reasoning. But Shaftesbury introduces real confusion by way of effectually concealing his purpose; and when we get rid of the tiresome personages who thrust their eloquence upon us, we discover an argument torn to shreds and patches, and needing entire re-arrangement before we can catch his drift. Dr. Spicker, who does not speak of these defects, has applied the proper remedy by reducing Shaftesbury's scattered utterances under logical heads, and brings out a far more definite and coherent meaning than would be discovered by any but a very attentive reader. Shaftesbury, in short, is deficient in the cardinal virtues of clearness and order; and the consequence is that, working upon abstruse topics, he tries the patience of his readers beyond all ordinary bearing. Perhaps this is a sufficient reason for the neglect which has overtaken him, for the writers are

few and fortunate who have succeeded in reaching posterity without the charm of a beautiful style. Are we further justified in assuming, on the strength of the common maxim, that the style indicates the man, and throwing him aside without further notice; or is there really some solid value in a writer who undoubtedly exercised a powerful influence upon English thought, and, as we see, has found such wide acceptance in foreign countries?

The best mode of answering that question would probably be to examine Shaftesbury's writings in rather closer connection with his historical position in English literature than has been done by Dr. Spicker. Without enquiring what sermons may be preached from the texts which he supplies, we may ask what the real man actually thought, and how he came to think it. In regard to the first question we have at least ample materials. Shaftesbury, in spite of his desultory mode of exposition, had a distinct theory about the universe, and has managed to expound it sufficiently, though circuitously, in the 'Characteristics.'

That book is a collection of essays published within the few years preceding his death. The first of these, the 'Letter on Enthusiasm,' gives Shaftesbury's view of the religious movements of his day. The doctrine which it contains, with some of its applications to moral philosophy and to literary criticism (the connection, as will presently appear, is characteristic), is ex-

pounded in the essay called 'Sensus Communis,' and in the 'Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author.' The essay on 'Virtue,' of which an imperfect copy had been published by Toland, is the most systematic statement of his views on morality; the 'Moralists, a Rhapsody,' is a kind of appendix to it, with an amplification of some of his conclusions. The 'Miscellaneous Reflections' form a running commentary on all the preceding essays; and the 'Choice of Hercules,' which completes the collection, is an æsthetic dissertation, which may be compared to Lessing's 'Laocoön.' The coincidence in thought is exhibited by Dr. Spicker, and De Quincey has prefaced his translation of Lessing's essay by a parallel between the two writers. As we shall not again refer to this subject, it will be enough to say that Shaftesbury deserves credit for partly anticipating the views of his more distinguished successor, though he has little to say which is worth the attention of any modern reader.

The remainder of his writings all turn more or less upon the great question of the theory of morals and their relation to religion, and it is as the representative of a particular theory of moral philosophy that Shaftesbury is chiefly remembered in England. His fame, even in that province of speculation, has become rather dim; yet he exerted a very powerful influence upon Butler, Hutcheson, and other English moralists; and, for that, if for no other reason, his views deserve some attention. They will be best expounded by

starting from the consideration of the influences which chiefly contributed to his intellectual development.

Shaftesbury, it need hardly be said, was by birth and education a fitting representative of the Whig aristocracy in its palmiest period. The grandson of Achitophel, and brought up under the influence of Locke, he imbibed from his cradle the prejudices of the party which triumphed in the Revolution of 1688. During his political life, though short and interrupted by ill-health, he was a supporter of the Revolution principles, and if he diverged from his party he professed to diverge from them by adhering more consistently to their essential doctrines. He accepted the Whig shibboleth of those days; he was in favour of short parliaments, opposed to standing armies, and ready to exclude all pensioners from seats in the House of Commons. Above all he shared the Whig antipathy to the High Church principles of the day. The whole party from Atterbury to Sacheverell was utterly hateful to him. The Church of England had been deprived by the Revolution of the power of persecution, but it still retained exclusive privileges. Dissenters, though not liable to punishment, were not admitted to full citizenship. Sound Churchmen, though compelled to accept toleration, clung all the more anxiously to the remnants of their old supremacy. To all such claims Shaftesbury was radically opposed. He was not, indeed, as without an anachronism he could not have been, opposed to a State Church. On

the contrary, he regarded it as a valuable institution, but valuable not as justifying the pretensions of priests, but as tying their hands. He held substantially the opinion which is common amongst a very large body of laymen at the present day. A Church, in strict subordination to the power of the laity, is an admirable machinery for keeping priestly vagaries within bounds. With a contemptuous irony he professes ('*Misc.*' V. chap. 3) his 'steady orthodoxy, resignation, and entire submission to the truly Christian and Catholic doctrines of our holy Church, as by law established.' He held in the popular phrase that the Thirty-nine Articles were articles of peace; that is to say, that they were useful to make controversialists hold their tongues, though it would be quite another thing if one were asked to believe them. For their own sakes he loved Dissenters as little as Churchmen, and despised them more; his ideal was an era of general indifference, in which the ignorant might be provided with dogmas for their amusement, and wise men smile at them in secret. The doctrines of all theologians, in fact, were infinitely contemptible in the eyes of cultivated persons; but the attempt to get rid of them would cause a great deal of useless disturbance. The best plan was to keep the old institution in peace and quiet, and to allow it to die as quietly as might be.

In all this there was nothing peculiar to Shaftesbury, nor even to Shaftesbury's era. So far, he might have been an ordinary representative of the great Revolution

families, who, when their position was once secure, were content with keeping things tolerably quiet so long as they could divide places and profit. He might have drunk to the glorious and immortal memory of our deliverer, and have become a candidate for office under Godolphin or Harley. Circumstances, however, led to his imbibing doctrines of a less commonplace character. He remained a member of the English aristocracy—at a time, it must be added, when the English aristocracy not only governed the country, but was qualified to govern by a more liberal spirit than that which animated the class immediately below it. But in him the English aristocrat was covered by a polish derived from a peculiar training. At an early age he had been sent to Winchester. The proverbial generosity and high spirit of an English public school exhibited itself by making the place too hot to hold him, as some retribution for the sins of his grandfather. Perhaps he had to learn the meaning of 'tunding.' He had already acquired a familiarity with the classical languages by the same method as Montaigne, under the guidance of a learned Mrs. Birch, and was able to enjoy reading Greek and Latin literature instead of having small doses of grammar pressed upon him by scholastic drillmasters. At a later period he made one of those Continental tours from which young men of promise and position must sometimes have derived a training rather different from that which falls to the lot of the modern tourist.

In Italy he learnt to have a taste, and his writings are coloured, and sometimes to an unpleasant degree, by the peculiar phraseology of the artistic connoisseur. In Holland he made the acquaintance of the leaders of European criticism, Bayle and Leclerc. He learnt that England was not the whole world, and discovered that the orthodox dogmas did not entirely satisfy the demands of the enquiring minds of the time. He acquired, in short, certain cosmopolitan tendencies. 'Our best policy and breeding,' he complains (*Misc.* III. ch. i.), 'is, it seems, to look abroad as little as possible; contract our views within the narrowest possible compass, and despise all knowledge, learning, and manners which are not of home growth.' Had the term been popularised in his day, he would have complained of the Philistine tendencies of his countrymen, and insisted upon that unfortunate provincialism which is characteristic even of our best writers. He has little hopes, he tells us (*Misc.* III. ch. i.), of being relished by any of his countrymen, except 'those who delight in the open and free commerce of the world, and are rejoiced to gather views and receive light from every quarter.' He is always insisting upon the importance of cultivating a refined taste, as the sole guide in art and philosophy. 'To philosophise in a just signification is but to carry good breeding a step higher' (*ib.*) 'The taste of beauty and the relish of what is decent, just, and amiable, perfects the character of the gentleman and the philosopher.' The person who has

thoroughly learnt this lesson is called, in his old-fashioned dialect, the 'virtuoso;' and the various phrases in which he expounds his doctrines may be translated into modern language by saying that he is a prophet of culture, a believer in 'Geist,' and a constant preacher of the advantages of sweetness and light. In short, Lord Shaftesbury may for such purposes be called the Matthew Arnold of Queen Anne's reign. Mr. Arnold, indeed, possesses what Shaftesbury only imagined himself to possess—a style of singular elegance, and has profited by a culture far more complete than could fall to the lot of Shaftesbury. Such analogies, indeed, are always unfair to one or both of the writers compared, and I merely intend to give a slight indication to modern readers of Shaftesbury's general tendencies. Meanwhile it is needless to insist too strongly upon the resemblance, for we may, without any help from such indirect methods, interrogate Shaftesbury himself.

His first two treatises give us his view of contemporary theologians. The 'Letter concerning Enthusiasm' was provoked by the strange performances of the French prophets, who were holding revivals and working miracles in London amidst an unbelieving population. The old spirit of Puritanism was at its very lowest ebb. The generation of Dissenters which had produced Baxter and Bunyan had passed away; that which was to produce Wesley and Whitefield was still in its cradle. Nothing remained but a grovelling

superstition, unlovely in its manifestations, and ridiculous to the cultivated intellect of the time. Shaftesbury speaks of their performances as a Saturday Reviewer might speak of an American camp-meeting. Their supposed miracles are explained by the natural contagion of an excited crowd of fanatics. 'No wonder if the blaze rises of a sudden; when innumerable eyes glow with the passion, and heaving breasts are labouring with inspiration; when not the aspect only, but the very breath and exhalations of men are infectious, and the inspiring disease imparts itself by immediate transpiration.' (*Enthusiasm*, § 6). For such a disease there is one complete panacea. Ridicule is the proper remedy for fanaticism. Persecution would fan the flame. These charlatans would be grateful if we would only be so obliging as to break their bones for them 'after their (the French) country fashion, blow up their zeal, and stir afresh the coals of persecution.' (*Ib.* § 3.) We have had the good sense instead of burning them to make them the subject of a 'puppet-show at Bart'lemy fair' (*ib.*); and Shaftesbury ventures to suggest that if the Jews had shown their malice seventeen centuries before, not by crucifixion, but by 'such puppet-shows as at this hour the Papists are acting' (*ib.*), they would have done much more harm to our religion.

The evil which lay at the bottom of these displays was that delusion to which our ancestors gave the name of enthusiasm. In appropriating that word

exclusively to its nobler meaning, we have lost something, though the transformation is insignificant of some desirable changes; for, in truth, enthusiasm, as Shaftesbury defines it, is an ugly phenomenon. 'Inspiration,' he says, 'is a real feeling of the Divine presence, and enthusiasm a false one' (*ib.* § 7), to which he adds significantly that the passions aroused are much alike in the two cases. To mistake our own impulses for the immediate dictates of our Creator is indeed a grievous blunder, and when the mistake is made by a passionate and ignorant fanatic, it is especially offensive to the man of culture. Shaftesbury, however, is careful to point out that enthusiasm was not confined to ignorant Dissenters. It supplied also the leverage by which the imposing hierarchy of Rome forced their dominion upon an unenlightened world. Enthusiasm may appeal to the senses as well as the spirit. With the marvellous skill which wise men have admired, even whilst revolted by its results, the priests of that august and venerable Church succeeded in turning to account all the weaknesses of mankind. Instead of opposing the torrent, they ingeniously forced it into their service. To provide for enthusiasm of the loftier kind, they allowed 'their mysticks to write and teach in the most rapturous and seraphic strains.' (*Misc.* II. ch. 2.) To the vulgar they appealed by temples, statues, paintings, vestments, and all the gorgeous pomp of ritual. Allowing a full career to all the thaumaturgical juggleries of monks

and wandering friars, they also permitted 'ingenious writers' to call these wonders in question 'in a civil manner.' No wonder, he exclaims, if Rome, the seat of a monarchy, resting on foundations laid so deep in human nature, appeals to this day to the imagination of all spectators, though some are charmed into a desire for reunion, whilst others conceive a deadly hatred for all priestly dominion.

Shaftesbury of course belongs to the latter category. For this, as for its twin form of enthusiasm, he still had recourse to the remedy of ridicule. He maintained as a general principle, and thereby bitterly offended many solemn theologians, that raillery was the test of truth. Truth, he says, 'may bear all lights' (*Wit and Humour*, Pt. I. § 1), and one of the principal lights is cast by ridicule. He compresses into this axiom the theory practically exemplified by the Deists and their pupil, Voltaire, and he gives the best defence that can be made. Satire, we know, is the art of saying everything in a country where it is forbidden to say anything. Ridicule is the natural retort to tyranny. ''Tis the persecuting spirit that has raised the bantering one.' (*Ib.* § 4.) The doctrine should, perhaps, be qualified. When men are sufficiently in earnest to fight for their creeds, they are too much in earnest for laughter. It is at a later period, when the prestige has survived the power, when priests bluster but cannot burn, when heterodoxy is still wicked but no longer criminal, that

satire may fairly come into play. The dogmas whose foundations have been sapped by reason, and are still balanced in unstable equilibrium, can be toppled over by the shafts of ridicule. Its use is not possible till freedom of discussion is allowed, and not becoming when free discussion has produced its natural fruit of setting all disputants on equal terms. Ridicule clears the air and disperses the mists of preconceived prejudices. When they have once vanished, the satirist should give place to the calm logician. Shaftesbury, though an advocate of the use of ridicule, was, as we have said, very unskilful in its application; nor is he to be reckoned amongst the Deists who made an unscrupulous use of this rather questionable weapon. He does not aim at justifying scoffers, but rather desiderates that calm frame of mind which is appropriate to the cultivated critic. In his own dialect, he is in favour of 'good humour' rather than of a mocking humour. 'Good humour is not only the best security against enthusiasm,' he tells us, 'but the best foundation of piety and true religion.' (*Enthusiasm*, § 3.) Good humour is, in fact, the disposition natural to the philosopher when enthusiasm has been exorcised from religion. Shaftesbury's ideal, as we shall presently see, is a placid and contented attitude of thought, resting on a profound conviction that everything is for the best, and a perception of the deep underlying harmonies which pervade the world. The sour fanatic and the bigoted priest are at the

opposite poles of disturbance, whilst he dwells in the temperate latitudes of serene contemplation. He shares with the Deists, and, indeed, with all the ablest thinkers of his time, with Locke and Clarke, as well as with Collins and Tindal, the fundamental dogma of the rationalists, the necessity of freedom of discussion; but he wishes for freedom, not to enable him to attack the established creeds, but to adapt the intellectual atmosphere to a gradual spread of philosophical sentiment.

This tendency of Shaftesbury distinguishes him from the ordinary Deist. The difference of his temper is indeed so marked that Mr. Hunt (*Religious Thought in England*, vol. ii. pp. 342 et seq.) scruples to reckon him amongst them. Mr. Hunt is, it seems to me, unnecessarily anxious to defend the Deists in general from the charge of Deism. It is hardly worth asking whether Shaftesbury cared to veneer his rationalism with Christian phraseology or not. As a matter of fact, I believe him to have been consciously a Deist; and a comparison of the passages brought together by Dr. Spicker will, I think, establish the charge, if it must be called a charge. Nothing, however, could be farther from his intention than to adopt an attitude of unequivocal hostility to that vague body of amiable doctrine which was then maintained by the latitudinarian divines, and which, in our days, is reflected in what is called 'unsectarian Christianity.' It suited his purpose very well; and so long as priests were

well under the heel of the secular power, why trouble oneself too much about their harmless crotchets? At one place he sets himself to prove three points: first, that 'wit and humour are corroborative of religion and promotive of true faith;' secondly, that they have been used by the 'holy founders of religion;' and thirdly, that 'we have, in the main, a witty and good-humoured religion.' (*Misc.* II. ch. iii.) He passes with suspicious lightness over the proof of the last head; but the phrase, 'in the main,' is evidently intended to exclude a vast body of doctrine which generally passed for orthodox, but which, in his opinion, was the product of splenetic fanaticism. So long, however, as religion makes no unpleasant demands upon him, he will not quarrel with its claims. He 'speaks with contempt of the mockery of modern miracles and inspiration;' he inclines to regard them all as 'mere imposture or delusion;' whilst on the miracles of past ages he resigns his judgment to his superiors, and on all occasions 'submits most willingly, and with full confidence and trust, to the opinions by law established.' (*Misc.* II. ch. ii.) It would be hard to speak more plainly. A miracle which happened 1,700 years ago hurt nobody; but any pretence to discovering Divine action in the modern world must be rejected with contempt as so much imposture. He is quite ready to take off his hat to the official idols of the day; but it is on condition of their keeping themselves quiet, and working no more miracles. The dogma that

miracles have ceased is the best guard against modern fanatics and sectaries; and our belief must rest not upon signs and wonders, but on the recognition of uniform order throughout the universe.

With such views, the chief temptation to shock the sensibilities of orthodox writers was afforded by the Jews. The bare mention of that barbarous and enthusiastic race was enough to startle every Deist, open or concealed, out of his propriety. They were the type of everything that was hateful in his eyes, and their language was immovably associated with the most recent outbreaks of enthusiasm. The idol of the Puritans was the bugbear of the Deists. Shaftesbury hated them with the hatred of Voltaire. When writing as a literary critic, his examples of subjects totally unsuitable for poetic treatment are taken from Scripture history. No poet, as the friend of Bayle naturally thinks, could make David interesting. 'Such are some human hearts that they can hardly find the least sympathy with that only one which had the character of being after the pattern of the Almighty.' (*Soliloquy*, Pt. III. § 3.) When writing as a moralist, again, he illustrates the bad influences of superstition as opposed to genuine religion from the same fertile source. If in a system of worship there is anything 'which teaches men treachery, ingratitude, or cruelty, by Divine warrant, or under colour and pretence of any present or future good to mankind; if there be anything which teaches

how to persecute their friends through love; or to torment captives of war in sport; or to offer human sacrifice, or to torment, macerate, or mangle themselves, in a religious zeal, before their God; or to commit any sort of barbarity or brutality, as amiable or becoming,' such practices, whether sanctioned by custom or religion, must remain 'horrid depravity.' (*Virtue*, Book I. Pt. II. § 3.) A deity he presently adds, who is furious and revengeful, who punishes those who have not sinned, who encourages deceit and treachery, and is partial to a few, will generate similar vices among his worshippers. (*Ib.* Pt. III. § 2.) The reference to the Jews in these passages, sufficiently plain in itself, is more explicitly pointed in his subsequent writings. The remark upon human sacrifices, for examples, is explained by reference to the story of Abraham and Isaac (*Misc.* II. ch. iii.), and the origin of enthusiasm is discovered in priest-ridden Egypt, whence it was derived by the servile imitation of the Jews. Shaftesbury was certainly a Theist; but it is equally plain that he was not a worshipper of Jehovah. Whether the form of belief, which is generated by effectually purifying Christianity from Judaism, Romanism, and supernaturalism, may fairly be called Deism, is a question of no great importance; whatever its proper name it would roughly describe Shaftesbury's religious theories.

Meanwhile, Shaftesbury was anxious to reconstruct as well as to destroy, or at any rate to save from the

wrecks of the old creeds enough to make a tolerable refuge for the cultivated human soul. Suppose, he says, that we had 'lived in Asia at the time when the Magi, by an egregious imposture, had got possession of the empire;' imagine that their many cheats and abuses had made them justly hateful; but imagine further that they had endeavoured to recommend themselves by establishing the best possible moral maxims: what would be the right course to pursue? (*Wit and Humour*, Pt. II. § 1.) Would you try to destroy both the Magi and their doctrines; to repudiate every moral and religious principle, every natural and social affection, and make men, as much as possible, wolves to each other? That, he says, was the course pursued by Hobbes, who, both in politics and religion, went on the principle of 'magophony,' or indiscriminate slaughter of his opponents. The reaction against old opinions was carried by that great thinker, the man who did more than any other to stimulate English thought during the century which followed his death, to an extravagant excess. Shaftesbury had been profoundly influenced by Hobbes's chief opponents, the Cambridge Platonists, and even wrote a preface to a volume of sermons published by Whichcote, one of their number. His ambition was to confine the destructive agency represented by Hobbes within due limits, and to preserve what was good in the old creed whilst sympathising with the assault upon the 'Magi,' who had made their own profit out of the

perversions of the religious instinct. But how was this desirable object to be accomplished? The writers who in that age corresponded to the modern Broad Churchmen affected a kind of metaphysical theology. Clarke, the ablest rationalist amongst the clergy, formed his system from the fragments of Des Cartes, Spinoza, and Leibnitz. Clarke occupied towards them the same position which Dean Mansel occupied towards recent German metaphysicians. He hoped to soften down their philosophy sufficiently to make it a trustworthy servant of Christianity. His chief book aims at being a kind of theological Euclid, starting from certain primary axioms as to matter, force, and causation, and proving the existence and attributes of God as Euclid proves the relations between the sides and angles of a triangle. Should Shaftesbury associate himself with writers of this class? His cosmopolitan training told him that their day was already past. Then, as more recently in Germany, metaphysicians had erected a vast tower of Babel, intending to scale heaven from earth. Like the work of the ancient labourers on the plains of Shinar, their ambitious edifice was all falling to ruins, and its sole result had been to create a jargon detestable to all intelligent men. Shaftesbury uniformly speaks of metaphysics with a bitter contempt. The study represented to him nothing but a set of barren formulæ fitted only for the pedants of the schools. Their doctrines were, in the German phrase, a mere *Hirngespinnst*—a flimsy cob-

web of the brain. 'The philosophers are a sort of moonblind wits, who, though very acute and able in their way, may be said to renounce daylight; and extinguish, in a manner, the bright visible outside world, by allowing us to know nothing besides what we can prove by strict and formal demonstrations.' (*Misc.* IV. ch. 2.) He ridicules the philosophical speculations about 'formation of ideas,' their compositions, comparisons, agreement and disagreement.' (*Soliloquy*, Pt. III. § 1.) Philosophy, in his sense, is nothing but the study of happiness (*Moralists*, III. § 3), and all these discussions as to substances, entities, and the eternal and immutable nature of things, and pre-established harmonies and occasional causes, and primary and secondary qualities, are so much empty sound. 'The most ingenious way of becoming foolish,' as he very truly says, 'is by a system' (*Soliloquy*, Pt. III. § 1); and, in truth, the systems then existing were rapidly going the way of many that had preceded and of many that were to follow them. But should Shaftesbury follow the thinkers who were preparing their downfall, such as his own preceptor Locke, or endeavour to anticipate Berkeley and Hume? From any such attempt he was precluded both by his opposition to purely sceptical speculation, and by a want of metaphysical acuteness. The first is shown by his condemnation of Locke, and the second by the fact that, whilst repu-

diating the metaphysical theorists, he really takes from them the central support of his own doctrines.

Thus far we have traced Shaftesbury by his antipathies. Representing the objects of his enmity by modern names, we might compare him to a modern thinker who should be opposed to Mr. Mill's experiential philosophy, to Dean Mansel's adaptation of German metaphysics, to Dr. Newman's Catholicism, and to Mr. Spurgeon's Protestantism; who should agree with Bishop Colenso's attacks on the letter of the Bible, but think them painfully wanting in breadth of view; and who should have been deeply influenced by the teaching of Coleridge, and yet have cast it off as too reactionary in spirit. Substitute for those names Locke, Clarke, Bossuet, the French prophets, Collins and Cudworth, and we have a very fair repetition of Shaftesbury's position. The resemblance between the state of opinion then and now is probably the cause of the interest still attached by Dr. Spicker to Shaftesbury's teachings.

The deluge is rising higher than of old; and the ark in which later metaphysicians promised to save a select few shows ominously symptoms of foundering altogether. While it is yet time, cannot we put together some raft from the floating wreck, which may in time bring us to the new and happier world?

Shaftesbury's first effort was to cast overboard certain Jonahs in the shape of dogmatic divines. To be less metaphorical, he endeavoured to render

morality independent of the old theology. He opposes new theories to the theological conceptions of the universe, of human nature, and of motives to virtue. A belief in God is indeed an essential part of his system; but the God whom he worships is hardly the God of Christians, any more than He is the God of the Jews. The belief in justice must, as he urges, precede the belief in a just God. (*Virtue*, Book I. Part III. § 2.) The right kind of Theism follows from morality, not morality from Theism. And thus 'religion' (by which he means a belief in God) 'is capable of doing great good or great harm, and Atheism nothing positive in either way.' A belief in a bad deity will produce bad worshippers, as a belief in a good deity produces good ones. Atheism, indeed, implies an unhealthy frame of mind, for it means a belief that we are 'living in a distracted universe,' which can produce in us no emotions of reverence and love, and thus it tends to embitter the temper and impair 'the very principle of virtue, natural and kind affection.' (*Ib.* Pt. III. § 3.) A belief in God, on the other hand, means with Shaftesbury a perception of harmonious order, and a mind in unison with the system of which it forms a part. Atheism is the discordant, and Theism the harmonious, utterance given out by our nature according as it is or is not in tune with the general order.

If at times he uses language which would fit into an orthodox sermon about a 'personal God' (see

Moralists, Pt. II. § 3), he more frequently seems to draw his inspiration from Spinoza. At the bottom of all Shaftesbury's eloquence lies the doctrine of optimism, which he shares with Leibnitz: 'Whatever is, is right,' as Pope expressed the lesson which he perhaps learnt from Shaftesbury, or in the phrase of Pangloss, 'Everything is for the best in this best of all possible worlds.' He opens the 'Enquiry into Virtue' by arguing that there is no real ill in the universe. All that is apparently ill is the mere effect of our ignorance. The weakness of the human infant, for example, is the cause of parental affection; and all philanthropical impulses are founded on the wants of man. 'What can be happier than such a deficiency as is the occasion of so much good?' (*Moralists*, Pt. II. § 4.) If there be a supremely good and all-ruling Mind, runs his argument, there can be nothing intrinsically bad. An inversion of the logic would correspond more accurately to his state of mind. He believes in God because he will not believe in the reality of evil. The Deity gives him the leverage of repelling all ill from the world. Christians, it is sometimes said, are forced to believe in a Devil as the antithesis of the good principle; they require a scapegoat to bear the responsibility of our sins. Shaftesbury abolishes the Devil and sin together. He refuses to look at the dark side of things, and declares it to be a mere illusion.

In conformity with this view, he expends all his

eloquence upon the marvellous beauties of the universe. We can perceive, he says, a universal frame of things, dimly indeed, and yet clearly enough to throw us into ecstasies of adoration. He invokes the Muses, and sings prose hymns to nature in the attempt to expand the words of Dryden's hymn :—

> From harmony, from heavenly harmony,
> This universal frame began,
> From harmony to harmony
> Through all the compass of the notes it ran,
> The diapason closing full in man.

Harmony is Shaftesbury's catchword. On that text he is never tired of dilating. If in the general current of harmony there are some discords, they are to be resolved into a fuller harmony as our intelligence rises. If we complain of anything useless in nature, we are like men on board a ship in a calm, and ignorant of its purpose, who might complain of the masts and sails as useless incumbrances. (*Moralists*, Pt. II. § 4.) He dwells, however, less upon metaphors of this kind, which suggest Paley's view of the Almighty as a supreme artificer, than upon the general order and harmony (for that word is never far from his lips) perceptible throughout the universe. God, we may almost say, is the harmony, though he does not explicitly adopt Pantheism. Theocles, the expounder of his theory in 'The Moralists,' sets forth this view in a set hymn to nature, which, in spite of its formalities and old-fashioned defects of style, is at times really eloquent. 'O

mighty nature!' he exclaims, 'wise substitute of Providence, empowered creatress! Or, thou empowering Deity, supreme Creator! thee I invoke, and thee alone adore! To thee this solitude, this place, these rural meditations are sacred; whilst thus inspired with harmony of thought, though unconfined by words and in loose numbers, I sing of nature's order in created beings, and celebrate the beauties which resolve in thee, the source and principle of all beauty and perfection.' There is beauty in the laws of matter, in sense and thought, in the noble universe, in earth, air, water, light, in the animal creation, and in natural scenery. (*Moralists*, Pt. III. § 1.) Pope or Wordsworth—for the two have some points in common—may expound his views in rhetorical verse and in lofty poetry. We need not pursue him into details.

From the conception thus expounded, all Shaftesbury's views of morality and religion may be easily deduced. His quarrel with the theologians of his day rests on far deeper grounds than any mere quarrel about Hebrew legends or Christian miracles. His objection to belief in the letter of Scripture is a corollary from his theory, not its foundation. He is radically opposed to the most characteristic doctrines of divines. He charges them, in substance, with blaspheming God, the universe, and man. They blaspheme God because they represent Him as angry with His creatures, as punishing the innocent for the guilty, and appeased by the sufferings of the virtuous. They

blaspheme the universe because, in their zeal to 'miraculise everything,' they rest the proof of theology rather upon the interruptions to order than upon order itself. (*Moralists*, Pt. II. 5.) They paint the world in the darkest colours in order to throw a future world into relief, and thus, as Bolingbroke afterwards put it, the divines are in tacit alliance with the Atheists. Make the universe a scene of hideous chaos, and is not the inference that there is no God more legitimate than the inference that a God exists to provide compensation somewhere? Shaftesbury's view may be compared with Butler's, whose writings bear the strongest traces of his influence. Shaftesbury, like Butler, insists upon the necessity of regarding the universe as a half-understood scheme. We cannot, he says, understand the part without a competent knowledge of the whole. The spider is made for the fly, and the fly for the spider. The web and the wing are related to each other. To understand the leaf one must go to the root. (*Virtue*, Book I. Pt. II. § 1.) Every naturalist must understand the organisation in order to explain the organs. (*Moralists*, Pt. II. § 4.) But in Butler's view, the world of sense is imperfect and unintelligible except as a preparation for a future world. Earth is the ante-room to heaven and hell. It is the seed-plot of the harvest that can only be reaped in eternity. If man, to adopt Shaftesbury's familiar illustration, is the fly, the Devil is the spider. In Shaftesbury's

view, on the other hand, there is no Devil and no spider beyond the limits of the universe. The world is a complete whole in itself. The harmony is perfect without the chorus of angels. The planets sing as they shine, 'the hand that made us is Divine;' but they do not require the interpretation of a supernatural revelation. The Divinity, he thought, had been exiled from the universe, and it was his purpose to reclaim for the world around us the treasures of beauty which divines had removed to heaven.

But, most of all, the divines had blasphemed man. The dogmas which assert the corruption of our nature are radically opposed to Shaftesbury's theory. Here, again, the same delusion was to be encountered. In their zeal to vindicate God, the divines had pronounced all our own qualities to be essentially vile. They had given our virtues to God, and left us merely the refuse of selfishness and sensuality. This is the explanation from another side of his doctrine of enthusiasm. You call your own impulses Divine inspiration, he says in effect, when they are essentially human. With an affectation of self-abasement you are really indulging in blasphemous arrogance. The delusions from which you suffer are the natural effect of the misconception. God has endowed man with his virtuous as well as with his indifferent and his vicious impulses. By arbitrarily dividing humanity, you fall into abject superstition, for you are as apt to make your God out of the vicious as of the virtuous qualities. Virtue

itself becomes a mere form of selfishness; for the vile creature must be moved by base motives. Heaven and hell are modes of appealing to self-interest. Shaftesbury, indeed, does not explicitly deny the existence of a hell, or, at least, he does not deny that a belief in hell has its advantages—for the vulgar. But he labours energetically to show that hopes and fears of a future state are so far from being the proper motive to virtue, that they are rather destructive of its essential character. Not only may such weapons be pressed into the service of an evil deity, but they are radically immoral. The man who obeys the law under threats is no better than the man who breaks it when at liberty. 'There is no more of rectitude, piety, or sanctity in a creature thus reformed than there is of meekness or gentleness in a tiger strongly chained, or innocence and sobriety in a monkey under the discipline of the whip.' The greater the obedience, the greater the servility. The habit of acting from such motives strengthens self-love, and discourages the disinterested love of God for His own sake. (*Virtue*, Book I. Pt. III. § 3.) In short, 'the excellence of the object, not the reward or punishment, should be our motive,' though, where the higher motive is inadequate, the lower may be judiciously brought in aid. (*Moralists*, Pt. II. § 3.) 'A devil and a hell,' he elsewhere puts it, 'may prevail where a gaol and gallows are thought insufficient;' but such motives, he is careful to add, are suitable to the vulgar, not to

the 'liberal, polished, and refined part of mankind,' who are apt to show that they hold such 'pious narrations to be indeed no better than children's tales or the amusement of the mere vulgar.' (*Misc.* III. ch. ii.) Hell, in short, is a mere outpost on the frontiers of virtue, erected by judicious persons to restrain the vulgar and keep us from actual desertion, but not an animating and essential part of the internal discipline. The doctrine of hell, in the hands of vulgar expositors, implies a belief in the utter selfishness of mankind. We are essentially vicious 'tigers' or 'monkeys,' to be kept in awe by the chain and the whip. The cynics of the time, of whom Mandeville was the most prominent representative, accepted this theory of human nature, whilst abolishing the doctrine founded upon it. In their view, expanded into a philosophy by Hobbes, the arch-enemy, and crystallised into maxims by Rochefoucauld, man was selfish, and all his virtues mere modifications of selfishness. Mandeville tried to show that public spirit, honour, chastity, and benevolence were simply vices in disguise. They were not the less useful because founded on hypocrisy, but they were mere hollow shows. Shaftesbury's attack upon this doctrine was that which chiefly commended him to his contemporaries. They would accept even a Deist as an ally against a deadlier enemy. The term 'moral sense,' which he invented to explain his doctrines, was turned to account by his successors. Hutcheson worked up the theory with

little alteration into an elaborate system. In Butler the moral sense is transformed into a conscience, a word more appropriate to his theological conceptions. Hartley tried to explain the moral faculty by the laws of association, and Adam Smith by resolving it into sympathy. In one shape or another it played an important part in the controversies of the century. For, in fact, when the old supports of morality were falling into decay, men naturally attached supreme importance to a bold assertion of the truth, that benevolence is not a cold-blooded calculation of our private interests. Shaftesbury was the leader in the struggle against that grovelling form of utilitarianism. Without tracing the connection of ideas more elaborately, it is enough to refer to the passage in which Shaftesbury gives his own view most pointedly. His writings are everywhere full of the same doctrine. Should anyone ask me, he says, why I would avoid being nasty when nobody was present, I should think him a very nasty gentleman to ask the question. If he insisted, I should reply, Because I have a nose. If he continued, What if you could not smell? I should reply that I would not see myself nasty. But if it was in the dark? 'Why, even then, though I had neither nose nor eyes, my sense of the matter would still be the same: my nature would rise at the thoughts of what was sordid; or if it did not, I should have a wretched nature indeed, and hate myself for a beast.' (*Sensus Communis*, Pt. III. § 4.)

Our hatred to vice, in short, is a primitive instinct. Shaftesbury, indeed, is rather apt to cut the knot. As he summarily denies the existence of evil, he is almost inclined to deny the real existence of vicious propensities; and he rather shirks than satisfactorily answers the difficulty arising from the possible collision between interest and virtue. He declares roundly that it does not exist. 'To be wicked or vicious is to be miserable;' and 'every vicious action must be self-injurious and ill.' Why, then, one is disposed to ask, is virtue so hard? But, indeed, to be an optimist one must learn the lesson of how to shut one's eyes.

Shaftesbury's theory, however, falls in with his general system. What, after all, is this moral sense of which he speaks? What are the special actions which it approves? How do we know that its approval is final? What is the criterion of morality, and what the sanctions which, in fact, oblige us to obey its dictates? Shaftesbury's reply, though vague and unsatisfactory enough, gives the kernel of his theory. The moral sense is merely a particular case of that sense by which we perceive the all-pervading harmony. That harmony, as revealed to our imagination, produces the sense of the beautiful; as partially apprehended by our reason, it produces philosophy; and as embodied in the workings of human nature, it gives rise to the moral sense.

The æsthetic and the moral perceptions are the same, the only difference being in the object to which

they are applied. 'Beauty and good, with you, Theocles,' he says, 'are still one and the same.' (*Moralists*, Pt. III. § 2.) Or, as he says elsewhere, 'What is beautiful is harmonious and proportionable; what is harmonious and proportionable is true; and what is at once both beautiful and true, is of consequence agreeable and good.' (*Misc.* III. ch. 2.) One consequence follows, from which Shaftesbury does not shrink. If the good and the beautiful are the same, the faculty of moral approbation is the same faculty which judges of the fine arts. We recognise a hero as we recognise a poet or a painter. And thus Shaftesbury's last word is, Cultivate your taste. Criticism is of surpassing importance in his eyes, because criticism is the art of forming accurate judgments, whether of religion, or art, or morality. He divides human passions into the natural affections, which lead to the good of the public; the 'self-affections, which lead only to the good of the private;' and those which, as simply injurious, may be called the 'unnatural affections.' (*Virtue*, Book II. Pt. I. § 3.) To eliminate the last, and to establish a just harmony between the others, is the problem of the moralist; and he will judge of the harmonious development of a man as a critic would judge of the harmony of a painting or a piece of music. Man, again, can be fully understood only as part of the great human family. He will be in harmony with his race when so developed as to contribute in the

greatest degree to the general harmony. He is a member of a vast choir, and must beat out his part in the general music. Hence he dwells chiefly on the development of the benevolent emotions, though explicitly admitting that they may be sometimes developed in excess. The love of humanity, however, must be the ruling passion. He meets the objection —one often made to Comte—that one may love the individual but not the species, which is 'too metaphysical an object' (*Moralists*, II. § 1), by maintaining that to be a 'friend to anyone in particular it is necessary to be first a friend to mankind.' (Ib. § 2.) He has been in love, he says, with the people of ancient Rome in many ways, but specially under the symbol of 'a beautiful youth called the Genius of the People.' Make such a figure of mankind or nature, and he will regard it with equal affection. The full answer to the difficulty is given in the hymn to nature, already noticed.

Amongst various comments upon Shaftesbury, this part of his system was selected for special attack. The moralists, generally known as the Intellectual school, maintained that it made all morality arbitrary. Price, for example, in his system of morality, argues that as there is no disputing about tastes, a moral theory which rests upon taste would allow of an infinite variety of fluctuating standards. Shaftesbury had anticipated and endeavoured to refute the objection. He declared that the maxims drawn from

political theories as to the balance of power were 'as evident as those in mathematics' (*Wit and Humour*, Pt. III. § 1), and inferred that moral maxims founded on a proper theory of the balance of passions would be equally capable of rigid demonstration. The harmony of which he spoke had an objective reality, and did not reside in the ear of the hearer. The cultivation of the moral sense was necessary to enable us to catch its Divine notes; but the judgment of all cultivated observers would ultimately be the same. If a writer on music were to say that the rule of harmony was caprice, he would be ridiculous. 'Harmony is harmony by nature, let men judge ever so ridiculously of music.' Symmetry and proportion are equally founded in nature, 'let men's fancy prove ever so barbarous or their fashions ever so Gothic in their architecture, sculpture, or other designing art. 'Tis the same case where life and manners are concerned. Virtue has the same fixed standard. The same numbers, harmony and proportion, will have place in morals; and are discoverable in the character and affections of mankind; in which are laid the just foundations of our art and science, superior to every other of human practice and comprehension.' (*Soliloquy*, Pt. III. § 3.) Shaftesbury is, in his own language, a 'realist' in his Theism and his morality. Virtue is a reality, and can be discovered by all who will go through the necessary process of self-culture.

Shaftesbury's half-aristocratic and half-philosophical scorn for the grovelling theories of his time has in it a strain of generous indignation. Those who retained the old supernatural machinery, and those who, whilst rejecting it, yet retained the correlative corruptions of human nature, alike deserved a rebuke. Man, doubtless, is not a mass of corruption, whose good instincts can only be supported by the lash of external terrors, or are themselves mere masks adapted for mutual deception. To admit that religion comes from within, and not from the intervention of some outward power, is to raise the dignity and self-respect of mankind. Shaftesbury's position that the good instincts are natural is, therefore, logically connected with the development of a wider and loftier theology than the old. The praise which has been lavished upon Butler, for his denial that all virtue could be resolved into self-interest, should be in fact reserved for his teacher. In truth, that denial falls in better with Shaftesbury's system; Butler not only speaks with hesitation and endeavours, as he puts it, 'to make every possible concession to the favourite passion' of self-love, but his conception of the universe is favourable to a saddened view of its inhabitants. Man, indeed, may have some capacity for self-denial and for unrequited benevolence; but the chief motive to self-denial is the utter worthlessness of the pleasures to be abandoned; and the rewards and penalties, though not the sole cause of motive, are so tremendous as almost to obliterate any

feebler motives. Man, shivering at the brink of hell, and tremblingly hoping for the joys of heaven, remembering always that his brief existence here is but a momentary prelude to a state of infinite and eternal joys or pains; conscious always that he is in presence of an inexorable judge, who reaps where he did not sow and gathers where he has not strawed; this shrinking, trembling criminal can have little power of distracting his mind from his own tremendous doom. It is not when waiting for a sentence of life and death that we can take much unselfish interest in our fellow-sufferers. Shaftesbury's ideal philosopher, feeling that his own nature is in some sense divine, despising all external motives as mere phantoms for terrifying the vulgar, has a better right to claim the merit of independent sympathy for his race. It is an emotion, not prompted nor commanded from without, but springing naturally in the human breast, which is in some sort the dwelling-place of the Divine essence.

But, from another point of view, Butler's doctrine, if not so philosophical, at least attracts a deeper sympathy. It embodies the sentiment to which all the great poets and the great teachers of our race owe a main part of their power. 'Our sweetest songs are those which tell of saddest thought;' for how should we not be stirred most profoundly by those who have felt most deeply the weight of sin and suffering and the ephemeral duration of human joy and suffering? Poetry is but too often the fragrance given out by a

sensitive nature crushed under the hard wheels of this world; and the poet's skill consists in blending the inevitable melancholy with some more elevating and inspiring moods, and bringing harmony out of pain. Butler's sombre musings are more impressive than Shaftesbury's easy-going optimism. Shaftesbury reminds us too often of Hotspur's fop. Standing amidst the relics of the desperate struggle of this life, amongst the carnage and shrieks of the wounded and the brutal triumph of the conquerors, he finds a solace in his elegant smelling bottle, skilfully compounded of the best philosophical essences. His morality may do for the 'virtuoso' or the fine gentleman, not for the poor private, mangled and struck down by the victorious powers of evil. He quietly abandons hell to the vulgar, and would half applaud the sentiment about God thinking twice before damning a person of quality. For the abolition, indeed, of a supernatural hell, one would have small fault to find with him, but can we thus placidly dismiss the hell which is around us; the hell of remorse, of sorrow, and of helpless pain? To fight against evil, where evil can be conquered, to resign ourselves to the evil which is inevitable, is our great duty in life; blandly to deny its existence is not the way to victory.

Shaftesbury's error, is, however, a natural consequence of his system, though his personal peculiarities, his position as a nobleman and a 'virtuoso,' bring it into additional relief. He would find God in

nature. Butler, finding nature to be full of horrors, makes God the source of much that is terrible. Shaftesbury assumes that, as nature is divine, all that is natural must be worthy of adoration. God, when regarded as the universal creator of all things and all men, is still to retain the attributes of goodness, wisdom, and power. How, then, account for evil? It is the old problem; and Shaftesbury attempts to solve it chiefly by evasion. He gets rid of some evils by calling them unnatural. But is not this to restore the old distinction over again? Does not God at once become the God of a part, not of the whole, and therefore an interfering and not an all-pervading power? How are we to know what is and what is not unnatural? If God makes all things, why does He not sanction vice as well as virtue? This is the real meaning of the attacks made by other moralists upon Shaftesbury's ethical system. Admit a God who is, strictly speaking, the universal source of everything, and His will can no longer be the code of morality; He must be supposed to will the bad as well as the good, for the existence of anything proves it to be in accordance with His will. To resist Him is not wrong, but impossible. Shaftesbury attempts to answer by appealing to the universal harmony. But these fluent metaphors fail to give us any definite standard. What is this harmony? Is there, after all, any such harmony? Is not discord written on the face of creation with equal distinctness? Shaftesbury

resolutely sees harmony everywhere; but surely it is difficult to discover. In this painful world, Candide will get the better of Pangloss.

There are hideous things in the world which cannot be hid from sight or left out of our account in drawing up schemes of morality. Poverty, and starvation, and disease may be blessings in disguise, but the disguise will last our time. To say that they are not real evils, is useless for Shaftesbury's purpose. We have to assume their reality, whether or not we may be able to discover some day that they are ultimately mere shams. Nobody in grief or serious temptation would be influenced by Shaftesbury's plausible philosophising. To the statement that there cannot be evil, they reply only too confidently there is. The error into which Shaftesbury falls is something like the ordinary misconceptions of Berkeley's theory. Because there is said to be no such thing as substance, we are to knock our heads against a post. Because there is no cure for evil in Shaftesbury's metaphysical system, we are to act in this world of hard facts as if it were a mere fancy. It is better to take things as they are, and make the best of them without vain repinings in an equally vain attempt to retreat into a dreamland of philosophy.

CHAPTER VII.

MANDEVILLE'S 'FABLE OF THE BEES.'[1]

THE most complete antithesis of Shaftesbury was Bernard de Mandeville, author of the 'Fable of the Bees.' Between them the two writers give a very fair summary of the ethical tendencies of the eighteenth century freethinkers in England. They are treated as joint opponents of orthodoxy in several controversial writings of the times, as, for example, in Berkeley's 'Minute Philosopher,' in a very able essay on the 'Characteristics' by John Brown, better known as the author of the 'Estimate,' and in that amorphous mass of dissertation which Warburton called a 'Demonstration of the Divine Legation of Moses.' Their theories are the Scylla and Charybdis between which it was a delicate matter to steer a straight course. Agreeing in refuting the teaching of divines, they are at the opposite poles of speculation in all else; and it was some consolation to the orthodox

[1] The Fable of the Bees; or, Private Vices Public Benefits: with an Essay on Charity and Charity-schools, and a Search into the Nature of Society, &c. London, 1806.

that two such enemies of the faith might be, more or less, trusted to neutralise each other. Their relations to each other and to their common enemies illustrate some of the problems which were then agitating men's minds. The agitation has not quite subsided.

Mandeville published the 'Fable of the Bees' in 1714, three years after the appearance of the 'Characteristics.' It opens with a doggrel poem, setting forth that a hive of bees, once thriving and vicious, lost its prosperity together with its vice on a sudden reformation. A line or two from the conclusion gives the pith of the doctrine:

> Then leave complaints: fools only strive
> To make a great an honest hive—
> To enjoy the world's conveniences,
> Be famed in war, yet live in ease,
> Without great vices, is a vain
> Utopia, seated in the brain.

A comment follows expounding this cynical theory in detail. In subsequent editions, for the 'Fable' enjoyed a wide popularity for many years, were added various explanations and defences of the doctrine. In 1723 the book was presented as a nuisance by the Grand Jury of Middlesex. Observing, says that respectable body, with the 'greatest sorrow and concern,' the many books published almost every week by impious and licentious writers, whose 'principles have a direct tendency to the subversion of all religion and civil government, our duty to the Almighty, our love to our country, and regard to our oaths, oblige us

to present' the publisher of the 'Fable of the Bees,' and thereby, as it would appear, to give him a useful advertisement.

No harm followed to Mandeville in person. His reputation, however, was gibbeted in all the respectable writings of the day; his name became a bye-word, and his book was regarded as a kind of pothouse edition of the arch-enemy Hobbes. The indignation was not unnatural. Mandeville is said to have been in the habit of frequenting coffee-houses and amusing his patrons by ribald conversation. The book smells of its author's haunts. He is a cynical and prurient writer, who shrinks from no jest, however scurrilous, and from no paradox, however grotesque, calculated to serve the object—which he avows in his preface to be his sole object—of amusing his readers; readers, it may be added, far from scrupulous in their tastes. And yet, with all Mandeville's brutality, there runs through his pages a vein of shrewd sense which gives a certain pungency to his rough assaults on the decent theories of life. Nay, there are many remarks indicative of some genuine philosophical acuteness. A hearty contempt for the humbugs of this world, and a resolution not to be blinded by its professions, are not in themselves bad things. When, indeed, a man includes amongst the humbugs everything which passes with others for virtue and purity, his teaching is repulsive; though, even in such a case, we may half forgive a writer like Swift, whose bitterness

proves that he has not parted from his illusions without a cruel pang. Mandeville shares Swift's contempt for the human race, but his contempt, instead of urging him to the confines of madness, finds easy vent in a horse-laugh. He despises himself as well as his neighbours, and is content to be despicable. He is a scoffer, not a misanthrope. You are all Yahoos, he seems to say, and I am a Yahoo; and so—let us eat, drink, and be merry.

Mandeville's view of the world is thus the reverse of the superfine philosophy of Shaftesbury. For the dignified he substitutes the bestial theory of human nature; and in perfect consistency he speaks with bitter ridicule of his opponent. 'Two systems,' he says, 'cannot be more opposite than his lordship's and mine' (p. 205). 'The hunting after this *pulchrum et honestum*,' which with Lord Shaftesbury should be the sole object of human life, 'is not much better than a wild-goose chase' (p. 210); and if we come to facts, 'there is not a quarter of the wisdom, solid knowledge, and intrinsic worth in the world that men talk of and compliment one another with; and of virtue and religion there is not an hundredth part in reality of what there is in appearance' (p. 508). The frankness with which this opinion is uttered, is rarer than the opinion itself. Mandeville is but a coarse and crude interpreter of a doctrine which is not likely to disappear for want of disciples. He prides himself on being a shrewd man of the world, whose experience

has amply demonstrated the folly of statesmen and the hypocrisy of churchmen, and from whom all that beautiful varnish of flimsy philosophy with which we deceive each other is unable to cover the vileness of the underlying materials. He will not be beguiled from looking at the seamy side of things. Man, as theologians tell us, is corrupt; nay, it would be difficult for them to exaggerate his corruption; but the heaven which they throw in by way of consolation is tacitly understood to be a mere delusion, and the supernatural guidance to which they bid us trust, an ingenious device for enforcing their own authority. Tell your fine stories, he says in effect, to school-girls or to devotees; don't try to pass them off upon me, who have seen men and cities, and not taken my notions from books or sermons. There is a part of our nature which is always flattered by the bold assertion that our idols are made of dirt; and Mandeville was a sagacious sycophant of those baser instincts.

The paradox which has given his book its chief notoriety is that which is summed up in the alternative title, 'Private vices, public benefits.' The fallacy which lies at the base of his economical sophistries is, one might suppose, sufficiently transparent; and yet it not only puzzled the ablest thinkers of the day, but enjoys a permanent popularity. In slightly altered forms it is constantly reappearing, and repeated confutation never seems to kill it at the root. The doctrine is, in general terms, that consumption instead of

saving is beneficial to labourers. Mandeville exhausts his ingenuity in exhibiting it in the most extravagant shapes. 'It is,' he declares, 'the sensual courtier that sets no limits to his luxury; the fickle strumpet that invents new fashions every week; the haughty duchess that in equipage, entertainments, and all her behaviour would imitate a princess; the profuse rake and lavish heir, that scatter about their money without wit or judgment, buy everything they see, and either destroy or give it away the next day; the covetous and perjured villain, that squeezed an immense treasure from the tears of widows and orphans, and left the prodigals the money to spend; it is these that are the proper food of the full-grown Leviathan;' we require them in order to set all varieties of labour to work, and 'to procure an honest livelihood to the vast numbers of working poor that are required to make a large society' (p. 227). The doctrine, however extravagantly stated, is only a logical development of that which is put forward whenever a body of labourers is thrown out of work by a change of fashion. Nobody would now commend actual vice, but we have quite recently seen a defence of luxury on the ground that it employs labour. The 'sensual courtier,' indeed, is not excused, but the rich noble who lives in superfluous state is exhorted to lay to his soul the flattering unction that he is providing employment for the tradesmen who supply his wants. Political economists have shown the fallacy of such

arguments; but their refutation is constantly regarded as a gratuitous paradox.

The sophistry is, indeed, forced to conceal itself more carefully at the present day; for Mandeville delights in following it with perverse ingenuity to its furthest consequences. He pronounces the Reformation to have been scarcely more efficacious in promoting the national prosperity than 'the silly and capricious invention of hooped and quilted petticoats' (p. 228). 'Religion,' he adds, 'is one thing, and trade is another. He that gives most trouble to thousands of his neighbours and invents the most operose manufactures is, right or wrong, the greatest friend to society.' Nay, he manages to cap these extravagancies by arguing that even the destruction of capital may be useful. 'The Fire of London was a great calamity, but if the carpenters, bricklayers, smiths,' and others set at work, 'were to vote against those who lost by the fire, the rejoicings would equal if not exceed the complaints' (p. 230). Foolish paradoxes, it may be said, and useful at most in so far as an extravagant statement of a foolish theory may help to bring about its collapse. And yet the writer who expounded such glaring absurdities was capable of occasionally attacking a commercial fallacy with great success, and of anticipating the views of later and more eminent authorities. Thus, for example, though he cannot shake himself free from the superstition that the imports of a nation should not be allowed to exceed

the exports, he attacks certain current theories upon the subject by arguments which only require further extension to lead to a sound conclusion; and he illustrates the advantages of division of labour, not, indeed, with the felicity of Adam Smith, but in such a way as to show an apprehension of the principle at least equally clear. Mandeville, in fact, is not a mere dealer in absurdities. He has overlaid a very sound and sober thesis with paradoxes in which probably he only half believed. When formally defending himself, he can represent his arguments as purely ironical. He confesses, in a vindication against the Grand Jury, that he has stated in plain terms 'that what we call evil in this world, moral as well as natural, is the grand principle that makes us sociable creatures; the solid basis, the life and support of all trades and employments without exception; that there we must look for the true origin of all arts and sciences; and that the moment the evil ceases, society must be spoiled if not totally dissolved' (p. 248). The phrase, he admits, has an awkward sound; but had he been writing for persons unable to read between the lines, he would have explained in good set terms that his only meaning was that 'every want was an evil; that on the multiplicity of those wants depended all those mutual services which individual members of society pay to each other, and that consequently the greater variety there was of wants, the larger number of individuals might find their private interest in labouring

for the good of others, and united together compose one body' (p. 257). The streets of London, according to his own illustration, will grow dirtier as long as trade increases (Preface, p. viii.); and to make his pages attractive, he had expressed this doctrine as though he took the dirt to be the cause instead of the necessary consequence of the wealth. The fallacy, indeed, is too deeply embedded in his argument to be discarded in this summary fashion. The doctrine that the heir who scatters, and not the miser who accumulates savings, really sets labour at work, was so much in harmony with the ideas of that age, that even Berkeley's acuteness could suggest no better answer than the statement that an honest man generally consumes more than a knave. There is, however, a core of truth in the sophistry. Large expenditure is an evil so far as it indicates that consumption is outrunning accumulation; it may be called a good sign so far as it indicates that large accumulations render large consumption possible. Mandeville, confusing the two cases, attacks in the same breath the frugal Dutchman who saves in order to supply future wants, and the savage who, consuming little, yet consumes all that he produces, and produces little because he has no tastes and feels no wants. As against the savage his remarks are correct enough. The growth of new desires is clearly an essential condition towards the improvement of society, and every new desire brings new evils in its train. Indeed, there is only too much

to be said for the theory, when thus stripped of its paradoxical dress. The streets of London, to say nothing of the streets of New York, grow most undeniably dirty as a fuller stream of commerce flows through them, and leaves behind its questionable deposits. An increased cultivation of wheat is also unpleasantly favourable to the growth of tares; and it is in vain that our economical optimists repudiate all responsibility for the evils which inevitably accompany the blessings they promise. If, however, Mandeville had confined himself to this modest assertion, he would have fallen into the ordinary jog-trot of the moralists who denounce an excessive passion for wealth. It was pleasanter and more exciting to give a different turn to his doctrine. To make an omelette you must break eggs; don't deny in words what you preach by practice; admit frankly that the gain is worth the mischief; and it is but a step farther to say that the mischief is the cause of the gain.

The moral side of this edifying doctrine involves a similar ambiguity. Mandeville may be described as accepting the alternative forced upon us by ascetic moralists. Worldliness, they say, is vice; let us therefore abandon the world. We won't and can't abandon the world, replies Mandeville; let us be vicious and be candidly vicious. Accept in all sincerity the doctrine of contempt for wealth, with the fundamental theorem on which it reposes, that the

natural passions are bad; and we should be virtuous and barbarous. Accumulation of wealth, as the later economists tell us, is the natural base of all the virtues of civilisation, and the industrial view of morality is therefore opposed fundamentally to the views of certain orthodox preachers. Mandeville's paradox is produced by admitting with the divines that the pursuit of wealth is radically vicious, and by arguing with the economists that it is essential to civilisation. Luxury, according to his definition, should in strictness include everything that is not essential to the existence of a naked savage. Hence the highest conceivable type of virtue should be found in religious houses, whose inmates have bound themselves by rigid vows of chastity and poverty to trample the flesh under foot; or rather it would be found there if monks and nuns did not cover the vilest sensuality under a mask of hypocrisy, an opinion which has been confirmed by the evidence of 'many persons of eminence and learning' (p. 87). He would subscribe to Dr. Newman's opinion that in the humble monk and the holy nun are to be found the true Christians after the Scripture pattern, if he could believe that holiness and humility were ever more than shams. Now the ideal of a Trappist monk is plainly incompatible with the development of an industrious community.

From the same theory follows logically the denial of the name of virtue to every practice which is prompted by natural instinct. Thus, for example, the

force of maternal love appears to the ordinary moralist to be one of the most beautiful of human instincts. Mandeville, with perverse ingenuity, twists it into a proof that all virtue is factitious. You cry out, he says, with horror at the woman who commits infanticide. But the same woman who murders her illegitimate child may show the utmost tenderness to her lawful offspring. As a murderess and as a good mother she is equally actuated by the self-love which is really the spring of all our actions. The murder is produced by a sense of shame; destroy the shame, and you suppress the crime; the most dissolute women are scarcely ever guilty of this sin. A mother's love is produced not by any force of principle, but by the operation of natural instincts. The 'vilest women have exerted themselves on this head as violently as the best' (p. 35). Now 'there is no merit in pleasing ourselves,' and, indeed, an excessive love for children is often their ruin, which shows that it is prompted by a desire for our own welfare and not for the happiness of our children. Imagine yourself, he suggests, to be locked up in a room looking upon a yard through a grated window; suppose that you saw in it a pretty child of two or three years at play; and that a 'nasty overgrown sow' (p. 156), came in and frightened the poor child out of its wits. You would do all you could to frighten it away. But if the overgrown sow, being in a famished condition, were to proceed to tear the helpless infant to pieces, whilst you looked on

without the power to interfere, none of the passions vaunted by moralists would equal your sensations of pity and indignation. What is the inference? That there would be no need of virtue or self-denial to be moved at such a scene, and that not only a humane man, but a highwayman, a housebreaker, or a murderer would feel the same. This pity, therefore, is a mere counterfeit of charity. It comes in through the eye or ear; and if we read of three or four hundred men being killed or drowned at a distance, we are not really more moved than at a tragedy. Reason would tell us to grieve equally for the sufferings which we see and for those which we do not see; but the vehement emotion of pity is only caused by the painful objects which immediately assail our senses. It is the rising of the gorge at an offensive sight, not a deep-seated intellectual motive. In the same spirit, he argues with offensive coarseness that modesty is merely a sham. 'Virtue bids us subdue, but good breeding only requires that we should conceal our appetites' (p. 33). Good breeding involves no self-denial; but only teaches us to gratify our sensuality according to the custom of the country; and a man may wallow in all kinds of indulgence and be sure that he will have 'all the women and nine-tenths of the men on his side' (p. 33).

Once more, theologians condemn the military as well as the industrial passions; and here, too, they are merely covering over our brutal natural passions with

a flimsy veil, and affecting to condemn what everybody knows to be essential to the welfare of society. Duelling, for example, is forbidden by law, and is yet essential to that code of honour without which there would be no living in a large society. Why should a nation grudge to see some half-dozen men sacrificed in a year 'to obtain so valuable a blessing as the politeness of manners, the pleasure of conversation, and the happiness of company in general' (p. 131), whilst it exposes thousands of lives for an end which may often do no good at all? Religion bids you leave revenge to God; honour bids you reserve it scrupulously for yourself; religion forbids and honour commands murder; religion orders you to turn the other cheek, honour to quarrel for a trifle; religion is built on humility, honour on pride; how to reconcile them must be left to wiser heads than mine' (p. 132). The argument is pointed by an elaborate portrait, which curiously recalls Richardson's ideal hero. He describes Sir Charles Grandison by anticipation (p. 306). He sets before us a fine gentleman of the highest type, lavish in his expenditure, but always guided by the most exquisite taste; cheerful and cordial in his demeanour; never omitting due courtesy to the meanest of his guests; solid as well as amusing in his conversation, and never using an indecent or a profane word; careful in his religious observances, charitable to the poor, a father to his tenants, a liberal but strictly just master to his

servants, and in that capacity remarkable for this special touch of good sense, that he never allows them to accept gratuities from his visitors on any pretence. What, then, is to be said against this pattern of all the virtues of a gentleman? Mandeville replies by putting the same dilemma which so terribly puzzled Richardson (p. 317). Suppose our spotless hero to receive an insult from somebody of equal position but of less self-command. What will he do? Obey the laws of God and submit; or the laws of honour, which have at most the force of an oral tradition? Richardson evades the problem by endowing his hero with a skill of fence equally remarkable with his other superlative excellences. Mandeville equally assumes that his Grandison will fight, and allows no evasion of this rather *naïf* variety. The hero's conduct supplies a crucial experiment, showing what is the ultimate law by which he is guided. The ridicule of his equals and the mob will have more weight with him than the fear of hell. In other words, pride is the dominant principle of his nature. It is the Protean passion which really accounts for the whole system of behaviour which we have so much admired. Christianity and honour lay down two different codes. Where they conflict, all gentlemen unhesitatingly obey the code of honour. If to covet honour, as Shakespeare puts it, be a sin, then clearly the men of honour are the most offending souls alive. We are like Catholics in a Protestant country, who cannot be trusted because

they pay allegiance to another than their lawful sovereign. Hide it from ourselves as we may, the master whom we really obey is not God, but public opinion. This theory of Mandeville's perhaps suggested some of Pope's keenest satire. It is a systematic statement of the poet's pet doctrine of the Ruling Passion.

> Search, then, the ruling passion; there alone
> The wild are constant, and the cunning known;
> The fool consistent, and the false sincere;
> Priests, princes, women no dissemblers here:
> This clue once found unravels all the rest,
> The prospect clears, and Wharton stands confest.

The same theory, according to Mandeville, will include not only Wharton and Marlborough and Chartres and Bolingbroke, but Berkeley and Addison (the 'parson in a tie-wig,' as Mandeville called him), and all the saints and moralists, as well as the sinners and blasphemers of the age. The love of honour is our one principle, and love of honour is merely a decent periphrasis for a desire to gratify our vanity. The gentleman values himself on his fidelity to his word. 'The rake and scoundrel brag of their vices and boast of their impudence.' In both the fundamental principle is the same.

The argument is, in one sense, a mere juggle. The artifice is transparent. Pride is a dyslogistic epithet given to a natural passion which may be good or bad. Call it self-respect, and the paradox vanishes. To desire the sympathy and praise of our fellow-creatures

is not a bad motive, though it may accidentally come into collision with virtuous desires. To say that the vilest have natural affections is not to prove that the natural affections are a sham, but that there is virtue even in the most abandoned. Beneath the paradoxical outside, however, there lies a rough protest against the old theological dogmas. Human nature rises against the theory which pronounces it to be hopelessly corrupt, and which, by a logical consequence, proceeds to estimate all virtue by the degree in which natural instincts are suppressed. Mandeville may be interpreted as refusing to accept the monastic ideal of virtue; though his refusal certainly takes an awkward form. Your theologians, he says, have endeavoured to cramp men's intellects and to eradicate their passions. Possibly you may have fitted them for another world, but you have certainly incapacitated them for this. You exiled the masculine virtues from the sickly and attenuated forms of Catholic saints and hermits; but secular life cannot be carried on without them. The code of honour expresses an attempt of the native vigour of the race to break the fetters with which priests would shackle it. Our spiritual physicians, as Mandeville understood them, proposed to bleed us, like so many Sangrados, till we were fitted for a diet of herbs and water; and to justify the operation, they assured us that our blood was vitiated and corrupt. Mandeville says that if we would enjoy robust health we cannot afford to lose a drop of blood;

but instead of inferring that the blood is not corrupt, he infers that corruption is good. Brand all enjoyment as vice, and the natural effect of establishing an indelible association will be an avowed justification of vicious enjoyment. Mandevilles are the inevitable antithesis to an overstrained asceticism; and we may so far sympathise to some extent with his refusal to be mutilated to suit the fancies of priests.

Mandeville, however, goes farther. Wilfully, or deceived by his own sophistry, he declares that this code of honour, and, indeed, that morality generally, is a mere sham. He opens the commentary on his verses by a singular history of the process by which virtue first made its appearance in the world. Certain mysterious 'lawgivers'—persons who appear in all the theological speculations of the time—resolved for their own base purposes to invent virtue. These people 'thoroughly examined all the strength and frailties of our nature, and observing that none were either so savage as not to be charmed with praise or so despicable as patiently to bear contempt, justly concluded that flattery must be the most powerful argument that could be used to exalt human creatures' (p. 14). They extolled our superiority over the other animals, and assured us that we were capable of the most noble achievements; and 'having by this artful way of flattery insinuated themselves into the hearts of men, they began to instruct them in the notions of honour and shame.' Thus mankind became divided into two classes: the

'wild grovelling wretches' (p. 16) who pursued nothing but the gratification of their own appetites, and the nobler creatures who reduced their appetites under the bondage of their reason, and thus obtained the mastery over their fellows. Thus by 'the skilful management of wary politicians' mankind was induced to stigmatise those actions which were harmful to the public as vicious, and to call those which were beneficial virtuous. Even the vilest were interested in maintaining this theory, inasmuch as they received a share of the benefits produced by virtue; and, at least, found their account in repressing the competition of other vile persons by advocating the new maxims. The doctrine is summed up in the aphorism that 'the moral virtues are the political offspring which flattery begot upon pride' (p. 18). This preposterous caricature of modern utilitarianism is precisely analogous to the ordinary Deist doctrine that the sacred writings were simple forgeries. Virtue, like religion, was regarded as a mere figment when it was no longer believed to come straight from heaven. The only alternative admitted to the supernatural origin of all the beliefs the possession of which distinguishes us from beasts was their deliberate invention. Virtue therefore naturally presents itself as a mere fashion, changing like taste in dress or in architecture. Mandeville's argument, directed primarily against Shaftesbury, is simply an extension of that upon which Locke had conferred celebrity in the course of his attack upon

innate ideas. Shaftesbury had tried to prove that the standard of taste was invariable, and upon that doctrine had founded his theory of morality. Mandeville plausibly enough argues that it is fluctuating and uncertain in the highest degree. Sometimes the florist admires the tulip, at other times the carnation. Beards are worn in one country and shaved in another. Broad-brimmed hats succeed narrow brims, and big buttons alternate with little ones. 'What mortal,' he asks, 'can decide which is handsomest abstract from the mode in being?' (p. 208). Our taste is the ultimate arbiter, and our taste varies indefinitely and capriciously. Now 'in morals there is no greater certainty' (p. 209). The laws of marriage vary so widely that what is regarded as an abomination in one country is considered as perfectly becoming in another. A Mahommedan may regard wine-drinking with an aversion as great as that which we reserve for the practices which we most abhor; and in both cases the horror will be supposed to arise from nature. Which is the true religion? is the question which has caused more harm than all the other questions put together. At Pekin, at Constantinople, and at Rome, you will receive three replies, utterly different, but equally peremptory. Is not the search after a single standard a mere wild-goose chase?

The argument is hardly calculated to puzzle anyone at the present day. The believer in intuitive morality replies by pointing to certain primary beliefs which underlie the superficial variations; and the utilitarian

replies, as Berkeley replied in substance and Hume with greater detail and completeness, by giving an external test of morality. Since different races have supposed different actions to be beneficial, the standard of morals has varied very widely; and since the beneficial tendency of certain actions is palpable, the variation has been confined within certain limits. By this reply, Mandeville, as he had explicitly stated the utilitarian criterion, should have been convinced. His purpose, however, being simply to startle the prejudices of his readers, he was content to dwell upon the difficulty without suggesting the answer. He was the more open to an easy apparent refutation; and of the answers which he provoked, the most remarkable was the singularly clear and vigorous assault of William Law.[1] Law, now chiefly remembered for his later divergence into mysticism, was amongst the very ablest controversialists of his age. Few of his contemporaries show the same vigour of reasoning, and it would be hard to mention one who can stand beside him for fervid eloquence. This book was re-published in 1844 with a preface by Mr. Maurice, and it is an amusing literary phenomenon to see Law's clear and manly English interpreted into the peculiar dialect of his expounder. A fog is drawn before the sun to help us to read. Law makes short work of Mandeville's superficial sophistries: he strikes them down at a

[1] See Law's works, vol. ii. Edin. 1762.

single blow. An action, he says, is virtuous 'because it is in obedience to reason and the laws of God; it does not cease to be so because a body is formed by use or created by disposition easy and ready for the performance of it' (p. 41). On Mandeville's strange hypothesis that pity was not virtuous because spontaneous, 'all habits of virtue would be blameable' (p. 41), because all such habits make good actions more spontaneous. He, in short, who practises virtue with the least self-denial is the most virtuous man, for self-denial is not the essence, but an accident of virtue. Mandeville's attempt to prove virtue to be arbitrary is met as victoriously as his attempt to prove that it is not meritorious. The theory is self-contradictory. Science, says Law, is only an improvement of those first principles which nature has given us. The mathematician must start from axioms obvious to all mankind. Take them away and the science vanishes. 'Do but suppose *all* to be invented, and then it will follow that nothing could be invented in any science' (p. 23). Morality would not be arbitrary, but inconceivable, if we had not some primary perceptions of right and wrong. The beautiful theory of a fiction started by hypothetical legislators is ingeniously parodied by a similar theory as to the origin of an erect posture. Some clever philosopher discovered that though man crept on the ground, he was made up of pride, and flattery might set him on his legs. They told him what a grovelling thing it was to creep on

his legs like the meanest animals; and thus they 'wheedled him into the honour and dignity of walking upright to serve their own ambitious ends, and that they might have his hands to be employed in their drudgery' (p. 20). Virtue is no mere cheat; it is 'founded in the immutable relations of things, in the perfections and attributes of God, and not in the pride of man or the craft of cunning politicians' (p. 29).

This, and much more, is excellent logic—too good, one might think, to be thrown away upon such poor game as the big-button theory of morality. And yet at this point there intrudes a certain doubt as to whether Law has really struck the vital point of Mandeville's theory. It is, doubtless, utterly absurd to suppose that men were cheated into virtue—as absurd as to suppose that they were cheated into an upright posture. The doctrine was only possible, even as an amusing paradox, in days when men could argue seriously that all the prophets and apostles were vulgar impostors. It might be summarily swept aside on to the rubbish heap, where extinct fallacies decay till they are picked up for the amusement of some student of human eccentricity. But Law's reply seems to assume that we are driven to a choice between two alternatives, neither of which is accepted by modern thinkers. Strauss does not hold that the early Christians were cheats, any more than he holds them to have been supernaturally inspired. The doctrines which they preached were the natural fruit of the

human intellect working under certain conditions at a given stage of its development. The same change has passed over speculators upon morality. If not invented, it yet need not have been revealed. Man was not cheated into standing upright, nor was he made standing upright; the upright posture appeared at a certain period in the course of his development from monkeyhood. Prove, as Mandeville tried to prove, that morality was originally due to the working of certain simple passions, and it certainly will not follow that morality is a matter of mere arbitrary fashion, varying indefinitely in different times and countries, like the taste for big buttons. We shall rather be induced to accept another branch of the dilemma. If we go to the root of the matter, we should rather say that a taste for big buttons was itself the product of certain uniform laws, acting as inflexibly as those which determine the details of our moral code. If morality is the creature of fashion, yet fashion is not the creature of chance, for chance has no existence. Springing from deeper and more uniform motives than those which regulate our taste in buttons, it is far less variable, but it is equally to be deduced from the workings of human nature and not from those vague entities, the 'immutable relations of things,' nor yet from our intuitions of the inconceivable essence of the Divine Nature. The 'Fable of the Bees,' in fact, contains, in its crudest and most offensive form, the germ of what would now be called the derivative

theory of morality, and falls into gratuitous perplexity by implicitly assuming chance as an objective reality, whilst in consistency Mandeville was bound to believe, and, indeed, actually professes his belief, in the universality of natural laws.

It is here, in fact, that we reach the logical foundation upon which Mandeville erected so strange a superstructure. The will of God (says Law) makes moral virtue our law. If we ask how this will appears, it is because we know that God is of infinite justice, and goodness, and truth. Every theologian must admit that this is the ultimate foundation of virtue; but the ever-recurring difficulty cannot be evaded. Are God's justice and goodness the same with ours? Must we not derive our knowledge of the Deity from our moral ideas instead of inverting the process? If so, must we not discover some external basis for morality, and, in that case, where is it to be placed? Law's answer at this time, when driven to his ultimate standing-ground, would apparently have consisted in an appeal to the external evidences of Christianity.[1] Such thinkers, however, as Shaftesbury and Mandeville, who, agreeing in little else, agreed in rejecting or ignoring the force of those evidences, were necessarily driven to a different answer. Law, in his anxiety to depreciate natural religion, declares that the light of nature amounts only to a 'bare capacity

[1] See his answer to Tindal's 'Christianity as old as the Creation.'

of receiving good or bad impressions, right or wrong opinions or sentiments, according to the state of the world we fall into.' (*Answer to Tyndal*, p. 113). Mandeville, sharing Law's contempt for human nature, would scarcely dispute this opinion; but he denied what Law strenuously asserted, that the light of revelation supplied the defects of nature. He calmly extinguishes both lights and leaves us to grope our way in the dark. Shaftesbury, as we have seen, maintains that the light of nature is abundantly sufficient by itself. The harmonies written everywhere on the face of the universe enable every reverent observer to discover the Creator. We 'look through nature up to nature's God.' It is here that he comes into the most vital contrast with Mandeville. How, in fact, can a theology which makes God a synonym with nature supply a basis for morality? As Pope said in the 'licentious stanza' afterwards omitted from the 'Universal Prayer'—

> Can that offend great nature's God,
> Which nature's self inspires?

Nature is an impartial and universal power: nature inspires hatred as well as love; and arms the murderer as well as the judge. The difficulty is that which, in one form or another, perplexes every attempt to substitute pure Deism for revealed religion. Nature is too vague a deity to supply intelligible motives for action, or to attract our love and reverence.

Butler's argument, both in the 'Analogy' and in

the 'Sermons,' is intended to meet this difficulty. His purpose is to show that nature, when rightly interpreted, bears witness to the existence of a power external to itself. We can read the great riddle, obscurely indeed, but yet so as to answer Pope's question satisfactorily. Some things, he maintains, which nature's self inspires, may be shown to offend great nature's God most unequivocally. Mandeville, on the other hand, pronounces the riddle to be hopelessly insoluble. Nature is and ever must remain an unknown god; 'every part of her works, ourselves not excepted, is an impenetrable secret to us that eludes all enquiry' (p. 422). The sufferings inflicted by nature are, with Butler, indications of Divine displeasure; with Mandeville, parts of a system, whose existence proves, indeed, that they have some purpose, but leaves that purpose utterly unintelligible. Nature makes animals feed upon each other. Waste of life, cruelty, lust, and voracity are the engines by which she works out her inscrutable purposes. Do you presume to blame them? 'All actions in nature, abstractly considered, are equally indifferent; and whatever it may be to individual creatures, to die is not a greater evil to this earth, or the whole universe, than it is to be born' (p. 441). Every attempt at a solution brings us back to the everlasting problem of the origin of evil. We see millions of living beings starved every year; we see the most exquisite organisms put together only to be profusely wasted.

Nothing is too good to be eaten by the vilest of its fellow-creatures. A common fly, he argues rather quaintly, is a marvellous piece of workmanship, and yet flies are eaten in myriads by birds and spiders, which are of no use to us. The wondrous harmonies which excite Shaftesbury's easy rhetoric explain nothing. Look at nature impartially, and you must confess that admiration is balanced by horror. In seeking to enlarge our conceptions of Deity, He becomes too vague to excite any human emotion. You will not have a God who takes part with a section of the human race; and you find it impossible to retain a God who takes part with virtue against vice, or with happiness against misery. When once the old anthropomorphic fancies are abandoned, nothing remains but a gulf of ignorance, across which no fine phrases can cast a trustworthy bridge. This, though it expresses the general tendency of Mandeville's argument, is not quite openly said; for, either to blind his purpose, or from real inconsistency, or, more probably, from love of paradox, he introduces an argument or two in favour of Providence, and even, ostensibly, in favour of the Divine origin of the Pentateuch.

Perhaps the most offensive, certainly the most original and instructive, part of Mandeville's reasoning is in its application to society. It is curious to find the very questions which now cause the bitterest discussions cropping up, though of course in a cruder

form, in the pages of Mandeville and Shaftesbury. The same battle is still raging, though the ground has a little shifted, and the combatants bring deadlier weapons and greater stores of ammunition into the field.

Shaftesbury ridicules the Hobbists as modern metaphysicians sneer at Mr. Darwin. How did man come into the world? Did he begin as a rudimentary embryo, from which presently sprouted here an eye, and there an ear, and then perhaps a tail, which luckily dropped off in time, leaving things, by good luck, just as they ought to be? 'Surely,' he says, 'this is the lowest view of the original affairs of human kind.' (*Moralists*, Pt. II. §4.) But recognise Providence instead of chance as the author of the world, and we must admit that the social affections are as natural to man as eyes and ears. Hobbes's state of nature implies a chaos which had no elements of stability. Society, too, must be natural to man, and it follows that he never did nor could exist without it. Shaftesbury, like Mr. Disraeli, is plainly 'on the side of the angels,' and would have taunted Mr. Huxley with his great-grandfather the ape. Mandeville replies in the spirit, and sometimes with the very arguments, of a modern believer in natural selection. Of nature, as a power apart from the phenomena which it governs, he knows nothing; and is, therefore, by no means disposed to sing hymns to it after the Shaftesbury fashion. We can only trace its purposes by its performances. 'Knowing,

à priori, belongs to God only. . . . Wretched man, on the contrary, is sure of nothing, his own existence not excepted, but from reasoning *à posteriori*' (p. 393). Experience tells us that in the brute creation nature's great moving forces are pain, hunger, and suffering. Why should we look for anything different amongst mankind? The one great fact which we discover by observation is that which we have lately learnt to call the struggle for existence. Society, language, all that makes us differ from brutes, has been forced upon us by the conflict between our self-love and the conditions of our existence. The first thing that drove men to associate was probably the dread of wild beasts, as is testified by the legends of dragons and monsters which abound in all ancient history. The union was next rendered firmer by their dread of each other. Pride, the universal prime mover, made the strongest and bravest force their dominion upon the weak and cowardly. The third step was the invention of letters, which made permanent laws possible, or, in other words, enabled men to take permanent precautions against the outbreaks of individual passions. Then followed the division of labour, which is the natural product of a peaceful state of society, and the groundwork of all civilisation. Religion arose from the natural tendency of children and savages to attribute feelings like their own to external objects; or, in Comtist phraseology, it began with fetishism. Legislators turned this fear of the invisible to account for

strengthening the authority of the laws. Language is gradually developed out of the simple signs by which even brutes can make themselves mutually understood. Ages were doubtless required for its development, and to raise up politicians capable of putting the passions to their true use, and finally achieving the highest triumph of turning 'private vices into public benefits.' It is by slow degrees and by a series of successive failures that the machinery which is now fancied to be the direct work of nature was gradually brought to perfection. 'We often ascribe,' he says, 'to the excellency of man's genius, and the depth of his penetration, what is in reality owing to length of time, and the experience of many generations, all of them very little differing from one another in natural parts and sagacity' (p. 361); a truth which he ingeniously illustrates by the case of a man-of-war, the mechanism of which is now explained by clever engineers, but which was in fact put together by a steady application of the rule of thumb.

Arguments such as these have a strangely familiar sound. The dress rather than the substance is altered. Mandeville had not heard of Mr. Darwin's struggle for existence; he had not studied Mr. Tylor's investigations of savage life; he knew nothing of Malthus's laws of population or of Ricardo's analysis of the operations of modern competition. But the theory of the world which underlies his speculations, and the method for which it gives foundation, is pretty nearly

identical. The world is the scene of a huge struggle of units driven by conflicting passions, and their mutual pressure gives for its final result all those complex social and intellectual products which others attribute to providential interference. Would you unravel the plan of this mysterious and shifting scene, it is in vain to rely upon *à priori* reasonings, or to fancy that you can discover the purposes of the hidden Creator. By observing the results you can discover how the phenomena are generated, and what laws they obey; but why the laws should be these, and none other, is beyond the reach of our intelligence. The historical cause may be discovered; the final cause is inscrutable. The modern man of science and the old reckless cynic agree in the resolution to look facts in the face, and to reject—sometimes rashly and brutally—anything that is not a hard, tangible fact. Hunger, lust, self-love are forces which cannot be overlooked; but the finer creations of awe, reverence, and humanity may be dismissed as mere phantoms or resolved into coarser elements. If you wish to examine into the origin of things, it is extremely convenient to discard as non-existent everything that defies a simple analysis. And thus it was tempting to regard human beings as moving exclusively under the influence of brutal and selfish passions, which are palpable to the most cursory observer, and which, by a little dexterous manipulation, can be made to account for everything. There is certainly enough self-deceit,

and hypocrisy, and cruelty, and selfishness in the world to be an awkward obstacle for optimists of the Shaftesbury type. So many things are humbugs, that it is but a step to declare everything to be a humbug, except the one moving force which we so dexterously disguise from ourselves and from each other. Assume that selfishness is to human beings what gravitation is to the planetary bodies, and the task of the psychologist is marvellously simplified. You say that the discovery is degrading; well, Mandeville would reply, I want to discover the truth, not to flatter your pride; and, on the same principle, you might call astronomy or physiology degrading. You are too proud to admit that the earth is not the centre of the universe, that you are made of flesh and bones, or that you have feelings in common with an ape; but, if those are the facts, what is the use of struggling against their recognition? Your dreams are pleasant; but it does not answer in the long run to mistake a dream for a reality.

The weak and the strong sides of the two theories are curiously contrasted. Each writer, of course, can resolutely ignore whatever is inconsistent with his hypotheses; he must be a very dull or a very acute philosopher who does not find that process necessary. Whilst Shaftesbury placidly shuts his eyes to the sin and suffering which offer insoluble problems to the consistent optimist, Mandeville seems almost to gloat over evils which may serve to perplex his adversaries.

Nature, so far from exciting rapturous enthusiasm, appears to him almost as a Moloch, delighting in the tortures of her creatures. Not that he is horror-struck or driven to despair. What is the use of being angry with the inevitable, or puzzling our heads over the inscrutable? Let us take what we can get in this blind, fierce struggle, and make ourselves as comfortable as we can under the circumstances.

Virtue is an empty pretence; for upon what can the service of this terrible deity repose except upon a clever calculation of our own interests? To feather our own nests as warmly as may be is our only policy in this pitiless storm. Lust and pride are realities; to gratify them is to secure the only genuine enjoyment. It is necessary, indeed, to use the conventional varnish of fine phrases, for flattery is a more potent instrument of success than open defiance of the world. But nothing is substantially satisfactory which is not perceptible to the senses. Mandeville, in short, is the legitimate precursor of those materialists of the last century who acknowledged the existence of nothing that could not be touched, tasted, and handled, and who were accustomed to analyse man into so much hydrogen, oxygen, and carbon, and declare that nothing remained to be discovered. Ridicule his conclusions by all means, as much as you please: condemn still more unequivocally the cynical levity with which he abolishes virtue, and proclaims the world to be a hateful farce. No language could be

too strong to convey our protest against such theories, were it not that they are too dead to need much protesting. But, after all is said that can or need be said, there is yet something on the other side. Mandeville's picture of the origin of society is far nearer the truth than Shaftesbury's, or than that of most contemporary philosophers. Partly, it is because his theories, which are a libel on civilised mankind, are not so far wrong when applied to man still half-brutal, and only showing the rudiments of religion or morality. But partly, too, the comparative accuracy of his results is due to the fact that his method is sound, though his spirit is detestable. An unflinching scepticism is a necessary, though a disagreeable, stage on the road to truth. Beautiful theories must be questioned, however attractive; and phantoms laid, whatever consolation they may have conferred. Mandeville, it is true, represents scepticism in its coarsest and most unlovely stage. He has taken the old theological system, and retained all that was degrading whilst summarily destroying what was elevating. If man be regarded as altogether vile, it is necessary to account for virtue by admitting the existence of some Divine element. But Mandeville will have nothing to do with the supernaturalism which has become incredible to him, nor with Shaftesbury's attempt to make nature itself Divine, which he regards as mere flimsy bombast. And thus he leaves nothing but a bare, hideous chaos, entirely godless in the sense that

it neither bears internal traces of Divine harmony, nor of the interference of Divine powers from without. Denying the reality of virtue, he sees no reason for providing any new form of belief round which the nobler impulses may gather. In short, he exhibits the result of taking the old theology and simply leaving out God. The result is naturally appalling. We have chaos without even a hint that some reconstructive process is necessary to supply the place of the old order. Without a God and without a hell and heaven, said theologians, there can be no virtue. Well, replies Mandeville in substance, we know nothing of God, and nothing of a future life; and I accept your conclusion that virtue is a humbug. True, it is a very convenient humbug; but men of sense may laugh at it amongst themselves, though of course men of sense will not laugh in public. To say this, though not quite in plain words, and to say it with a grin, does not imply a very noble character. Yet we may admit a kind of gratitude to the man whose sweeping demolition of the ancient superstructure evidences the necessity of some deeper and sounder process of reconstruction, and who, if the truth must be spoken, has, after all, written a very amusing book.

CHAPTER VIII.

WARBURTON.[1]

In the course of the once celebrated controversy between Warburton and Lowth, Lowth made one hit which must have told forcibly upon his opponent. He quoted the following passage from Clarendon's history:—'Colonel Harrison was the son of a butcher near Nantwich, in Cheshire, and had been bred up in the place of a clerk, under a lawyer of good account in those parts; which kind of education introduces men into the language and practice of business, and, if it be not resisted by the great ingenuity of the person, inclines young men to more pride than any other kind of breeding, and disposes them to be pragmatical and insolent.' 'Now, my Lord,' says Lowth, 'as you have in your whole behaviour, and in all your writings, remarkably distinguished yourself by your humility, lenity, meekness, forbearance, candour, humanity, civility, decency, good manners, good temper, moderation with regard to the opinions of others, and a modest diffidence of your own, this unpromising cir-

[1] Warburton's Works: London, 1811.

cumstance of your early education' (that, namely, of being educated in the same way as Harrison) 'is so far from being a disgrace to you, that it highly redounds to your praise.' Which piece of irony, being translated, expresses the most conspicuous fact in Warburton's character; namely, that he was as 'proud, pragmatical, and insolent' as might be expected from a man who brought to theological controversies the habits of mind acquired in an attorney's office. Warburton, in fact, is the most perfect specimen of a type not unfrequent amongst clergymen. We may still, though less often than formerly, observe a man in the pulpit who obviously ought to be at the bar; and though the legal habit of mind may be a very useful corrective to certain theological tendencies, the more common result of thus putting the square man in the round hole is to produce that kind of incongruity which in another profession gives rise to the opprobrious term of sea-lawyer. Warburton was, as we shall presently see, a lawyer to the backbone in more senses than one; but the most prominent and least amiable characteristic, which suggested Lowth's sarcasm, was his amazing litigiousness.

For many years together he led the life of a terrier in a rat-pit, worrying all theological vermin. His life, as he himself observed in more dignified language, was 'a warfare upon earth; that is to say, with bigots and libertines, against whom I have denounced eternal war, like Hannibal against Rome, at the altar.'

Among bigots and libertines we must reckon everybody, Christian or infidel, whose form of belief differed from Warburton's, and add that Warburton's form of belief was almost peculiar to himself. To entertain a different opinion, or to maintain the same opinion on different grounds, was an equal title to his hostility. He regrets in one place the necessity of assailing his friends. 'Why,' he asks, pathetically, 'did I not rather choose the high road of literary honours, and pick out some poor critic or small philosopher of this (the Deist) school to offer up at the shrine of violated sense and virtue?' 'Then,' he thinks, 'he might have flourished in the favour of his superiors, and the goodwill of all his brethren.' (IV. 79.) Alas! it could not be. His creed had that unique merit which he ascribes to the Jewish religion; namely, that it 'condemned every other religion as an imposture.' (IV. 74.) To disagree with him was to be not merely a fool, but a rogue. So universal, indeed, was his intolerance of any difference of opinion, that bigot and libertine, wide as is the sweep of those damnatory epithets, can by no means include all the objects of his aversion. He makes frequent incursions into regions where abuse is not sanctified by theology. The argument of the 'Divine Legation' wanders through all knowledge, sacred and profane, and every step brings him into collision with some fresh antagonist. Glancing at the table of contents, we find a series of such summaries as these:—'Sir Isaac Newton's chronology

of the Egyptian empire confuted, and shown to contradict all sacred and profane antiquity, and even the nature of things;' 'Herman Witsius's arguments examined and confuted;' a prophecy 'vindicated against the absurd interpretation of the rabbins and Dr. Shuckford;' the Jews 'vindicated from the calumnious falsehoods of the poet Voltaire;' 'an objection of Mr. Collins examined and confuted;' 'Lord Bolingbroke's accusation examined and exposed;' 'The Bishop of London's discourse examined and confuted;' and, in short, his course is marked, if we will take his word for it, like that of an ancient hero, by the corpses of his opponents. Deists, atheists, and pantheists, are, of course, his natural prey. Hobbes, 'the infamous Spinoza' (V. 124), and Bayle, Shaftesbury, Collins, Toland, Tindal, Chubb, Morgan, and Mandeville, but above all his detested enemy Bolingbroke, are 'examined and confuted' till we are weary of the slaughter. But believers do not escape much better. If, as he elegantly expresses it, he 'dusts Hume's jacket' for not believing in miracles, he belabours Wesley still more vigorously for believing that miracles are not extinct. From Conyers Middleton, the Essayist and Reviewer of that day, who, indeed, long escaped as a private friend, up to Lowth, Sherlock, and Jortin, he spared neither dignity nor orthodoxy. The rank and file of the controversial clergy, Sykes, and Stebbing, and Webster, fell before his 'desperate hook' like

corn before the sickle. And when the boundless field of theological controversy was insufficient for his energies, he would fall foul of the poet Akenside for differing from him as to the proper use of ridicule, or of Crousaz for misinterpreting the 'Essay on Man,' or of Bolingbroke for his assault upon the memory of Pope, or of a whole list of adversaries who gathered to defend Shakespeare from his audacious mangling. The innumerable hostilities which did not find expression in any of these multitudinous conflicts, struggled to light in the notes on the 'Dunciad.' Probably no man who has lived in recent times has ever told so many of his fellow-creatures that he held them to be unmitigated fools and liars. He stalks through the literary history of the eighteenth century ostentatiously displaying the most outrageous paradoxes, and bringing down his controversial shillelagh on the head of any luckless mortal who ventures to hint a modest dissent. There is, to me at least, a certain charm about this overflowing and illimitable pugnacity. We have learnt to be so civil to each other, that one sometimes fancies (and I suspect with some reason) that the creeds which excite so languid a defence are not very firmly held. At any rate, it is refreshing, in this milder epoch, to meet with a gentleman who proposes to cudgel his opponents into Christianity, and thrusts the Gospel down their throats at the end of the bludgeon.

Even Warburton, many-sided and complicated as

were his hostilities, was not above the necessity of finding allies. No man, though gifted with the most perverse ingenuity, can stand quite alone; and Warburton formed two remarkable connections. As is usual with boisterous persons, both these friends were men of a temperament very different from his own; as, indeed, two Warburtons would have formed a combination more explosive and unstable than any hitherto known to chemists. Both Pope and Hurd were suited to him by way of contrast. Warburton was well fitted to be Pope's bully, and Hurd to serve as the more decorous assistant of Warburton's vengeance. Pope seems to have been really touched by Warburton's blustering championship. It is a very pleasant thing to discover that you have been talking deep religious philosophy, when, in the innocence of your heart, you fancy that you have been versifying second-hand infidelity. The thin-skinned poet welcomed with almost infantile joy the aid of his pachydermatous defender, and naturally supposed that the man who had discovered him to be an orthodox philosopher, must be himself a profound divine. Warburton took a natural pride in having cut out so rich a prize from under the guns of the infidel Bolingbroke, and raised himself in general esteem by acquiring a right of spiritual proprietorship in the foremost writer of the time. The friendship with Hurd is more curious and characteristic. Hurd is a man for whom, though he has attracted a recent biographer, animated

by the ordinary biographical spirit, it is difficult to find a good word. He was a typical specimen of the offensive variety of university don; narrow-minded, formal, peevish, cold-blooded, and intolerably conceited. In short, as Johnson said of Harris, 'he was a prig, and a bad prig.' Even Warburton, we are told, could never talk to him freely. In his country vicarage he saw nobody, snubbed his curate, and never gave an entertainment except on one occasion, when Warburton, who was staying with him, was forced to rebel against the intolerable solitude. When a bishop, he never drove a quarter of a mile without his episcopal coach and his servants in full liveries. He rose to that eminent position chiefly on the reputation of writing in Addisonian style and being a good critic of Horace. The virtue which he particularly affected was filial affection, and, after three years' acquaintance, his Christian humility led him to confide to Warburton, who was the son of an attorney, that his own father had been a farmer. He was sufficiently amiable to mention his mother in endearing terms; and in a letter to Warburton, after touching upon certain presentation copies of his own book, and on Sir John Dalrymple's newly-published memoirs, he observes quite pathetically that the good old woman 'fell asleep almost literally' about a fortnight before. Warburton, though not a very noble creature, had at least a little more human nature about him. The relations between the pair of theologians naturally recall in some degree

those between Johnson and Boswell. Warburton, however, is but a feeble-jointed and knock-kneed giant compared with the lexicographer, and Hurd a very dry representative of Boswell. The flattery, too, was in this case reciprocal; and perhaps the great man pours out more mouthfilling compliments than his satellite. If Hurd thinks that Warburton's memory will be endeared to the wise and good for ever, Warburton regards Hurd as one of the first men of the day, and holds him to be Addison's equal in elegance, while far his superior in all solid merits. The two together looked out with condescension upon Warburton's humbler followers, and with infinite contempt on all the world beside. The general principle of their common creed is neatly expressed by Hurd, who says that 'one hardly meets with anything else' in this world but coxcombs; to which Warburton adds an admiring comment that no coxcomb has a grain of gratitude or generosity. The particular application of this maxim shows that Walpole is an insufferable coxcomb; Hume a cold, conceited, treacherous rogue; Johnson full of malignity, folly, and insolence; Garrick a writer below Cibber, whose 'sense, whenever he deviates into it, is more like nonsense;' Young 'the finest writer of nonsense of any of this age;' Smollett a 'vagabond Scot;' Priestley 'a wretched fellow;' and Voltaire 'a scoundrel.' Hurd carefully preserved the letters containing these beautiful specimens of Billingsgate, and left them for

publication after his death. The mode in which these congenial spirits co-operated during their lives is sufficiently illustrated by their quarrel with Jortin. Jortin, who had been on excellent terms with Warburton, mildly observed, in a 'Dissertation on the State of the Dead' as described by Homer and Virgil, that Warburton's 'elegant conjecture' as to the meaning of the sixth book of the 'Æneid' (a conjecture chiefly remarkable as affording the occasion of one of Gibbon's first literary efforts) was not satisfactorily established. Hereupon Hurd published a pamphlet, bitterly assailing Jortin for his audacity. Hurd's elaborate irony, as translated by a contemporary writer, amounted to presenting the following rules by which the conduct of all men should be regulated when in presence of the great master:—

'You must not write on the same subject that he does. You must not write against him. You must not glance at his arguments even without naming him. You must not oppose his principles though you let his arguments alone. You must not pretend to help forward any of his arguments that may seem to fall lame. When you design him a compliment you must not refuse it in full form, without impertinently qualifying your civilities by assigning a reason why you think he deserves them. You must never call any of his arguments by the name of conjectures, for you ought to know that this capital genius never proposed anything to the judgment of the public with diffidence in all his life.'

The infringement of such rules as these was, in fact, all that Hurd could lay to Jortin's charge. Warburton welcomed this assistance of his jackal with a perfect shout of delight. He knew but of one man from whose heart or whose pen so fine a piece of irony could come. Next to his pleasure in seeing himself 'so finely praised' was the pleasure he took 'in seeing Jortin mortified.' And in another letter he remarks that 'they must be dirty fellows indeed who can think I have no reason to complain of Jortin's mean, low, and ungrateful conduct towards me;' the whole crime of whom, be it observed, consisted in Jortin's differing from him as to the value of a critical conjecture. Jortin some time afterwards revenged himself on Hurd's master by pointing out certain blunders of which he had been guilty in a classical translation. Warburton, unable to deny the error, made a kind of surly overture to Jortin, which was coldly accepted; but no real reconciliation took place. The two conspirators abused Jortin in private, but did not again attack him for the abominable audacity of holding an opinion of his own.

The almost incredible arrogance, of which this is a pleasing specimen, breathes through most of Warburton's writings. Mr. Pattison says, rather broadly, that 'Warburton's stock argument is a threat to cudgel any one who disputes his opinion.' Though he does not often appeal thus explicitly to the *argumentum baculinum*, the cudgel is, in fact, never far

from his hand. His style is too cumbrous and diffuse to produce many of the terse epithets which Swift discharged at his enemies; but as we plod through his pages we come across some flowers of the eloquence supposed to be characteristic of Billingsgate, of which a specimen or two may be formed into a malodorous bouquet. I gather a few at random from different parts of his writings. In the course of his assault upon mystics, he informs us that the Moravian hymn-book is 'a heap of blasphemous and beastly nonsense.' (VIII. 343.) Of William Law, a man, as he admits, of great abilities, he says, the 'poor man is here fallen into a trap which his folly laid for his malice.' (VIII. 272.) Coming to less offensive writers, we may quote his character of Dr. Richard Grey, whom he had once called the 'truly learned and worthy writer on the Book of Job.' Grey offended him, and he spoke of his commentaries on Hudibras as the 'most execrable heap of nonsense' that almost ever appeared in any learned language. In one of his controversial writings he falls foul of him again. 'Though I had the caduceus of peace in my hands,' he observes, 'yet it was only in cases of necessity I made use of it. And, therefore, I chose to let pass, without any chastisement, such impotent railers as Richard Grey and one Bate, zany to a mountebank.' (XII. 508.) Bate was a respectable Hebrew scholar, but as a follower of the whimsical theories of Hutchinson, not quite undeserving of the taunt. We will turn to what War-

burton calls 'the pestilent herd of libertine scribblers, with which the island is overrun, whom I would hunt down as good King Edgar did his wolves, from the mighty author of "Christianity as Old as the Creation," to the drunken blaspheming cobbler, who wrote against "Jesus and the Resurrection"' (XII. 59); and those opponents of the existing order whom he describes as 'the agents of public mischief, which not only accelerate our ruin, but accumulate our disgraces, wretches the most contemptible for their parts, the most infernal for their manners.' (IV. 12.) Two great names will be enough. Of Hume he says in a tract, which is perhaps the weakest he ever wrote, as it took him furthest out of his depth, that he merely runs 'his usual philosophic course from knavery to nonsense' (XII. 352), and adds that Hume's 'great philosophic assertion of one of the prime master-wheels of superstition, labours with immovable nonsense.' Of a statement of Voltaire about the Jews, he remarks, 'I believe it will not be easy to find, even in the dirtiest sink of freethinking, so much falsehood, absurdity, and malice heaped together in so few words.' (V. 9.) It is almost pathetic to find Warburton throwing dirt at such men, in the placid conviction of his immeasurable superiority. A couple of instances of delicate irony shall close the selection. 'Even this choice piece of the first philosophy, his lordship's' (Bolingbroke's) 'sacred pages, is ready,' he says, 'to be put to very different uses, according to the tempers

in which they have found his few admirers on the one side, and the public on the other; like the China utensil in the "Dunciad," which one has used for a —— pot, and another carried home for his headpiece.' (II. 260.)[1] And here is his retort to the unlucky Dr. Stebbing, who conceived himself to have shown that the sacrifice of Isaac would be equally prophetic of Christ's death whether Warburton's interpretation be admitted or not. 'He hath shown it, indeed,' snorts his antagonist, 'as the Irishman showed his

[1] This passage, as I have quoted it, occurs in one of the Appendices to the 'Divine Legation.' It is reprinted with improvements from the letters on Bolingbroke (XII. 185), and the curious in matters of style may be amused by comparing the two forms of this brilliant passage. Another literary curiosity of a different kind may be worth a moment's notice. Warburton published, in 1727, a little book called 'An Enquiry into the Causes of Prodigies and Miracles,' which was afterwards suppressed. The last paragraph is an odd plagiarism from the famous passage in Milton: 'Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant nation, rousing herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks: methinks I see her as an eagle, mewing her mighty youth, and kindling her undazzled eyes at the full mid-day beam, purging and unscaling her long-abused sight at the fountain itself of heavenly radiance, while the whole noise of timorous and flocking birds, with those that love the twilight, flutter about, amazed at what she means, and in their envious gabble would prognosticate a year of sects and schisms.' Warburton's version is as follows: 'Methinks I see her, like the mighty eagle, renewing her immortal youth, and purging her opening sight at the unobstructed beams of our meridian sun, which some pretend to say that had been dazzled and abused by an inglorious pestilential meteor; while the ill-affected birds of night would with their envious hootings prognosticate a length of darkness and decay.' It is characteristic that in Warburton's version the eagle represents 'the university,' instead of the 'noble and puissant nation'; and the 'fountain itself of heavenly radiance,' is represented by the favour of His Gracious Majesty George I.

——.' (XI. 404.) The decorum of this passage in a grave theological discussion is perhaps unrivalled.

Nothing could exceed Warburton's confidence in the result of the warfare carried on by such weapons. Every now and then he announces that he pledges himself that some argument shall never again be regarded in 'the learned world' as anything but an ignorant prejudice; whilst a similar boast from one of his antagonists is declared to be worthy only of some 'wild conventicle of Methodists or Hutchinsonians. (IV. 347.) Warburton, indeed, trusts so implicitly in the efficacy of his arguments, that he ventures to take the dangerous line of insisting on the strength of the case against him. Nobody had thoroughly confuted Collins, until Warburton searched the matter to the bottom. Nay, it might be doubted whether the weight of the argument was not, on the whole, against Christianity, until he turned the scale. For want of the master-key by which he unlocked all difficulties, 'the Mosaic dispensation had lain for ages involved in obscurities, and the Christian had become subject to insuperable difficulties.' (VI. 256.) It is time to consider what was this marvellous expedient which had been concealed from the eyes of all theologians till the middle of the eighteenth century, and was now for the first time to base the evidences of revealed religion on an immovable foundation. The general principles on which he reasoned, and the special arguments which

justified these amazing pretensions, well deserve a little examination.

By way of preface to a more detailed statement, I may venture a word or two upon Warburton's special intellectual characteristic—his ardent passion for a paradox. He admits it himself with a quaint complacency. After stating that 'if the Scriptures have,' as Middleton had said, every fault which can possibly deform a language, this is so far from proving such language was not divinely inspired, that it is one certain mark of its original' (VIII. 281); he winds up his demonstration by asserting that the Koran became to true believers 'as real and substantial a pattern of eloquence as any whatsoever;' and adds that this is a paradox 'which like many others that I have had the odd fortune to advance, will presently be seen to be only another name for truth' (VIII. 289.) He is never so proud as when he has hit upon some proposition so ingeniously offensive to all parties, that, as he puts it, 'believers and unbelievers have concurred, by some blind chance or other' (VII. 315), in pronouncing his arguments absurd. The Warburtonian paradox is one of a peculiar class. He is not paradoxical, like some eminent thinkers—Hobbes, for example, or Berkeley —from a certain excess of acuteness. To such men, intellectual progress owes much, because their error consists chiefly in attaching too much importance to some half-truth, and serves at any rate, to impress it upon us by force of exaggeration. Warburton's most

audacious speculations seldom strike new light out of his subject; and, to say the truth, few men of equal vigour have ever shown less real acuteness. He was paradoxical as a deaf man writing upon music, or a blind man writing upon painting might be paradoxical. He blunders into the strangest criticisms upon Shakespeare from sheer want of even a rudimentary poetical faculty; and in the same way, he plays the queerest tricks with the Bible, from his deficiency in spiritual insight. Or we may say—and the analogy is perhaps closer—that his paradoxes are like those of a pettifogging lawyer, who strains the language of statutes into the most unexpected conclusions, in complete disregard of their spirit. He reads the Bible precisely like an Act of Parliament; and to him one argument is pretty much as good as another, so long as it can be deduced from any clause of the inspired text in due syllogistic form. It matters nothing that the whole meaning should have evaporated in the strange contortions to which the words of his documents have been subjected. He is fond of quoting Hobbes's inimitable maxim, that words are the counters of wise men and the money of fools. It exactly expresses his own practice. Give him a text which can be fitted into his argument, and he uses it with the most audacious confidence, caring nothing for the context or for the sense in which it must have been used by the original author. Although an argument constructed on such principles is devoid of any

intrinsic value—and, indeed, it may be doubted whether Warburton ever made a single genuine convert—there is yet one interest in the result. He brings into the most startling relief the current opinions of his day. A man of genius, even when using very dangerous arguments, is guided by a certain unconscious instinct from pressing them into the most offensive conclusions. Warburton, from his utter want of tact, blurts out the absurdities which a more acute writer judiciously throws into the background. Without attributing the slightest conscious dishonesty to many eminent reasoners, we may say that they know how to glide safely over the weaker parts of their system. An obtuse thinker of the Warburton order splashes indiscriminately through thick and thin, and unintentionally reveals to us the errors which perhaps exist, though in a latent form, in the theories of more judicious writers. From this point of view, he may be studied as illustrating the uglier tendencies of eighteenth-century theology. It may be added that we find in uncouth forms and in their native absurdity some arguments which still pass muster by the help of a little philosophical varnish. The 'Divine Legation of Moses Demonstrated,' is an attempt to support one gigantic paradox by a whole system of affiliated paradoxes. Warburton was a man of multifarious reading, but inaccurate scholarship, or, as Bentley more forcibly expressed it, of 'monstrous appetite and bad digestion.'

Johnson not unhappily applied to him a couplet from Savage—

> Here learning, blinded first and then beguiled,
> Looks dark as Ignorance, as Frenzy wild.

He has tumbled out his intellectual spoils into his ponderous pages with endless prodigality. Starting with the professed intention of proving the Divine authority of Moses, he diverges into all manner of subsidiary enquiries. He discourses at length on the origin and nature of morality; he gives the true theory of the alliance of Church and State; he devotes many pages to elucidating the sixth book of the 'Æneid,' and the nature of the ancient mysteries; he discusses the origin of writing and the meaning of hieroglyphics; he investigates the chronology of Egypt; he runs up an elaborate argument to determine the date of the Book of Job; he assails all manner of freethinkers, orthodox divines, Jews, Turks, Socinians, classical scholars, antiquarians, and historians, who happen to differ with him on some subsidiary question. At every stage in the argument some new vista of controversy opens before us; but every phenomenon in the universe, so it is said, is more or less connected with every other; and Warburton easily finds an excuse for rambling from one end of the whole field of human knowledge to the other, whenever there is an adversary to be encountered, or an instance of his reading to be illustrated, or, in short, any kind of caprice to be gratified. It is no wonder that a man

pursuing so vast a plan, and stirring up so many hostile prejudices at every step, wearied of his task before its conclusion, and dropped into calm episcopal repose long before the edifice had received its crowning ornaments.

The whole method involves an assumption, which is accepted, though seldom so ostentatiously put forward, by the so-called evidential school. Warburton maintains, in a curious passage, that it is as possible to make discoveries in religion as in science (VI. 228); but, as usual, his discoveries savour more of a legal than a scientific investigation. The truth of a religious doctrine is to be decided by a judicial enquiry. The devil's advocates are to be upset by the sudden turning up of some new bit of evidence or a novel interpretation of an old statute. Or we may consider the contest between the two parties as resembling a game of chess. Warburton is the discoverer of a new gambit (I apologise if my terms are wrong), which is to give the adversary a most unexpected checkmate. It had always been assumed that if one side were deprived of a leading piece, victory would incline to the other. Warburton shows how the apparent disadvantage may be converted, by skilful manipulation, into a means of assured triumph. The infidel pressing on in the highest security, suddenly finds himself, as it were, stalemated, and the game is, in vulgar language, pulled out of the fire. The position, in fact, was this. Deists, so he assures us, had made a great point of the

supposed absence from the Old Testament of any distinct reference to a future life. Apologists of Christianity had been put to rather awkward shifts, and had endeavoured, by forced interpretations, to relieve the Bible from this imputation. Warburton's discovery consisted in a new argument, by which the absence of the promise of immortality was to be admitted, but to be converted into what his title characteristically describes as a 'demonstration' of the truth of the Mosaic religion. For this purpose he erects his demonstration—one, as he informs us, which falls 'very little short of mathematical certainty, and to which nothing but a mere physical possibility of the contrary can be opposed' (I. 199)—on three very clear and simple propositions. The first is, that the doctrine of a future state of rewards and punishments is necessary to the well-being of society; the second, that the utility of this doctrine has been acknowledged by all mankind, and pre-eminently by the wisest and most learned nations of antiquity; the third, that this doctrine was not to be found in the Mosaic dispensation. Hence, he says, one would think that 'we might proceed directly to our conclusion that therefore the law of Moses is of divine original' (I. 200). Yet as some persons may be stupid enough to miss the logic of this argument, he draws it out more fully in elaborate syllogisms. Substantially they come to this. Moses would not have omitted a sanction which he knew to be essential, unless he had the certainty of a miraculous interference.

The statement that he ventured into the Desert without any adequate provision of food, might, perhaps, be urged as a proof that he reckoned upon a supply of quails and manna; and in the same way, the fact that he started his legislation without so essential a spiritual provision as a belief in hell, is taken by Warburton to show that he knew that a supernatural substitute for hell would be provided. What that was will be seen directly. Meanwhile, grotesque as the argument sounds when thus bluntly expressed, it may yet be said that, after all, it is scarcely more than a caricature of a highly respectable and still surviving line of argument. Some modern apologists are fond of arguing that Christianity was revolting to the ordinary mind, in order to prove that its success was miraculous. They are afraid to admit that it was adapted to the wants of the time, lest its growth should be regarded as spontaneous. And, therefore, they do their best to prove that human nature is naturally revolted by purity and humility, just as Warburton declared it to be so corrupt that nothing but the fear of hell could preserve it from utter decay.

The argument of the 'Divine Legation' is drawn into so elaborate a system, that any complete account of it would be impossible within moderate limits. Probably, however, it will be enough to notice two or three of its critical and characteristic points. Thus the whole edifice obviously rests on the assumption that nothing but a belief in a future world can make men moral.

The very fact which Warburton seeks to explain would apparently confute the theory at once. The Jews, he says, knew nothing of a future world; yet the Jewish economy prospered. Therefore, is the natural inference, the belief is unnecessary. No, says Warburton in substance. The facts contradict my theory; therefore, the facts are miraculous. His reliance upon the infallibility of an *à priori* argument, or rather upon a round assertion, gives at once the key to the whole character of the book. Warburton's attempt to prove the necessity of the doctrine in question is, in fact, as feeble as most of his speculative flights. It amounts simply to asserting in a great many words, that human beings will not be virtuous unless they are paid for it in another world. Neither a moral sense, nor a perception of the eternal fitness of things, will be sufficient motives without the obligation of a superior will. Nothing else, indeed, can 'make actions moral, *i.e.*, such as deserve reward and punishment.' In this view of morality, Warburton is of course merely anticipating Paley, and expressing the most current opinion of his time. No one, however, will dispute the originality of his application of the doctrine. That Moses, being well acquainted with the vital importance of the belief—for Warburton always speaks as if Moses was a highly intelligent politician of the eighteenth century, and fully acquainted with all its heresies—should have omitted to preach it, is sufficiently strange. But the paradox,

pretty enough as it stands, is heightened by a further argument. The ancient philosophers, as he informs us, generally disbelieved the doctrine, and yet systematically preached it for its utility. And thus we have the strange phenomenon that the one inspired teacher of the world neglected to preach, and all the false teachers elaborately preached, the doctrine on which morality essentially depends, and in both cases acted in opposition to their real belief.

In endeavouring to account for the singular fact, that a man of great intellectual vigour should have cheated himself into a state of mind so far resembling a genuine belief in this grotesque paradox as to stake his reputation on maintaining it—it is better not to decide how close a resemblance to belief that fact implies—we come to the best illustration of the stage of opinion at which he had arrived. Sir John Lubbock has lately observed that the best test of civilisation is the conception which a race is able to form of the Deity. This remark may be extended far beyond savages. In one of his fierce assaults upon Bolingbroke, Warburton says, 'I should choose to have the clergy's God, though made of no better stuff than artificial theology (because this gives him both justice and goodness), rather than his Lordship's God, who has neither, although composed of the most refined materials of the first philosophy. In the meantime, I will not deny that he may be right in what he says, that men conceive of the Deity *more humano*, and that his

Lordship's God and the clergy's God are equally faithful copies of themselves.' (II. 254.) Warburton's view of the Mosaic dispensation will enable us to form a tolerably adequate portrait of this deity, formed of artificial theology, who was a 'faithful copy' of the Bishop of Gloucester. If any word, unintentionally savouring of irreverence, should escape me in such an attempt, I must beg for pardon on the ground that I am only endeavouring to tread in episcopal footsteps.

We have already seen that the Warburtonian deity served in the first place as an omnipotent and supernatural Chief Justice. His duty was to sentence to condign punishment the Bolingbrokes, Spinozas, Tindals, and all other offenders against morality. But there is, at first sight, a capriciousness in his behaviour towards the Jews, for which, as the author of the hypothesis is silent, it is difficult to account. Warburton promised to clear the matter up to the meanest comprehension in the final book of the 'Divine Legation.' Unluckily, he became too weary of his work ever to finish up the argument satisfactorily. Even Archdeacon Towne, one of Warburton's humble friends, who was pronounced by the bishop to understand his works better than their author, is grieved at this omission. He can only make the rather lame remark, 'It is certain that a system may be true and well-founded, notwithstanding objections to it never have been and never can be answered.' He admits that adversaries will triumph, and will even urge that

the bishop could not answer the difficulties he had raised. Nothing is more probable: but, declining the task of accounting for that which the faithful Towne admits to be unaccountable, we may observe and wonder at the fact. For some reason, then, the Deity resolved to manage the Jews on a peculiar system; or, as Warburton calls it, by an extraordinary Providence. The meaning of which words appears to be as follows:—The ordinary human being is punished or rewarded in a future world according to his merits in this. In the case of the Jews, however, a system of cash payments was adopted. Every man had his accounts finally settled before death; and therefore the necessity of any belief in a future world, or indeed, as it would seem, of a future world at all, was entirely obviated. The proof that so marvellous a state of things actually existed, is touched with characteristic lightness. 'It would be absurd,' he says, 'to quote particular texts, when the whole Bible is one continued proof of it.' But his knockdown argument is as usual of the *à priori* kind; it must have been so, 'for a people in society, without both a future state and an equal Providence' (that is, a Providence equally working in this world), 'could have no belief in the moral government of God,' and would have relapsed into a savage state. Thus, as the Jews had no future state, they must have had an equal Providence. Q. E. D. Perhaps this heresy is the supreme expression of the popular creed, that the Bible generally refers

to a state of things altogether beside and apart from anything that comes within our ordinary experience. As Warburton naïvely says in attacking Plutarch, 'we know (though he did not) that all things' (in the Jewish history) 'were extraordinary, and nothing to be brought to example, any more than to imitation.' (IV. 243.) Warburton has an unequalled talent for caricaturing the most absurd opinions.

There are, however, some difficulties in realising so strange a condition. One or two corollaries from his doctrine require elaborate defence. Thus, for example, the Deity found it necessary to adopt certain regulations which savour of hardship. Though he punished evil-doers in this world, there are some 'men of stronger complexions superior to all the fear of personal temporal evil.' The knowledge that an Almighty power would punish them, a knowledge which, as he assures us, rested on the immediate evidence of their senses, would not keep them out of mischief. And, therefore, these hardened persons were to be reached through their 'instinctive fondness of parents to their offspring.' (V. 164.) That a man who would not be restrained by the fear of tortures inflicted by an Almighty ruler, should be restrained out of love for his children, is strange doctrine in Warburton's mouth; but the morality of the proceeding is still more questionable than its efficiency. Warburton's explanation on this head is characteristic. God, he says, was here acting, not as the Almighty

governor of the universe, but as the 'civil governor' of the Jews. In a theocracy sins were treasonable. 'Now we know it to be the practice of all States to punish the crime of leze-majesty in this manner. And, to render it just, no more is required than that it was in the compact (as it certainly was here) on men's free entrance into society.' (V. 167.) He proceeds to defend the system more fully by appealing to the English laws of forfeiture for high treason. In short, God Almighty would have been perfectly justified for his conduct under the British constitution, and what more could the Deist require?

Other difficulties, of course, abound when it is attempted to work out the details of this remarkable system. What, for example, was to become of the Jews in another world, after receiving their full recompense in this? How could future punishments or rewards be fair? Bolingbroke made a great point of this objection; and Warburton blusters more than usual in seeking to evade it. In the case of future punishments, he escapes, according to the ordinary theological device, by admitting that it is a mystery, and boasting of his admission as a complete solution of the difficulty. As to rewards, he says that he does not grudge the Jews the advantage of being paid twice over. To a similar difficulty as to the fate of men in the ages before Moses, he calmly invents 'a secret reprieve' (kept 'hid, indeed, from the early world,' and, it may be added, from everybody till the

days of Warburton) 'passed along with the sentence of condemnation. So that they who never received their due in this world would still be kept in existence till they had received it in the next; such being in no other sense sufferers by the administration of an unequal Providence than in being ignorant of the reparation which attended them.' God is thus supposed to have acted like some of the kings a few centuries ago, who, whilst agreeing to a treaty in public, made a private reservation for breaking it at their own convenience.

The God of Warburton, in fact, may be regarded as occupying a position towards the universe something like that of George III. towards the British people. Speaking generally, he was a constitutional ruler with a scrupulous regard for the exigencies of his position; he resorted to miracles as little as possible, just as a king would seldom bring his personal influence to bear; but in certain cases which, so far as human knowledge can reveal, were capriciously selected, he chose to govern, as well as to reign, and his action in those cases brought about a variety of complicated relations which it taxes all Warburton's legal skill to unravel. Once, after a long argument destined to vindicate the 'wisdom, purity, and justice' of the Almighty, he asks pathetically: 'How can I hope to be heard in the defence of this conduct of the God of Israel, when even the believing part of those whom I oppose seem to pay so little attention to the reason-

ing of Jesus Himself?' (IV. 323.) And, truly, it is rather a sad case for his clients when Warburton has to appear as the only counsel for the defence. The extraordinary perplexity of his system is due in part to that metaphysical conception of the law of nature which assumes great prominence in Warburton. This was, in fact, the common law of the universe, and, like that of England, was supposed to be a concrete embodiment of the perfection of wisdom. Its details, moreover, were capable of being marked out with mathematical accuracy, and Warburton has ascertained its precise provisions with a minuteness which is not a little astonishing. It is, for example, rather odd at the present day to find a man declaring, and that in capital letters—a favourite device with Warburton—that 'an ESTABLISHED RELIGION, with a TEST LAW, is the universal voice of nature.' (II. 292.) The original compact between the Church and State is drawn out in all its provisions with the accuracy of a conveyancer; and it is probable that no other human being ever discovered that a test law was an immediate consequence of the eternal fitness of things. The law of nature, however, has more bearing upon Warburton's main purpose in another direction. The essence of all religion, as he frequently states, is a belief in the divine system of rewards and punishments; a proposition which he generally illustrates by St. Paul's words, containing, as he thinks, the most concise statement of natural religion, that God is a 'rewarder

of them who diligently seek Him.' (III. 323.) But it does not follow on principles of natural religion, that punishments or rewards should be more than temporary. With characteristic audacity he goes so far as to assert that the notion of eternal penalties, instead of being discoverable by the unassisted reason, is absolutely revolting to it; and that 'fancy even when full plumed by vanity' (VI. 251) could scarcely rise to the idea of infinite rewards. Some kind of future state might, he thinks, be inferred by the light of nature; but we could know nothing as to its conditions; and the doctrine of immortality, which is the most essential spirit of the Christian revelation was rather repulsive than probable. When, therefore, the Almighty interferes by his direct action with the constitutional laws of the universe, a distinction has to be drawn, like that between the king as a person and the crown as a mere official figment. The results are complicated in the extreme. Mankind, for example, occupied a different legal position in regard to their Maker before the Fall, and in the interval between the Fall and the appearance of Moses; and the divine prerogatives differed as they affected Jews and Gentiles. The great change took place when the Almighty 'took upon Himself the office of Supreme Magistrate of the Jewish people.' As we have seen, he resolved for some inscrutable reason to govern them by temporal instead of eternal punishments, and it is a delicate problem to say how this would affect their

position in the world to come. He 'proceeded,' says Warburton, 'on the most equitable grounds of civil government;' he became king (of the Jews) 'by free choice;' and he thus acquired certain privileges, as, for example, that of prosecuting idolaters as traitors. As, however, direct punishments, even when inflicted upon posterity, proved to be inadequate, he enacted a cumbrous ceremonial destined to distract popular attention from the claims of pretenders, that is to say, of false gods. A certain Herman Witsius had the audacity to say that this theory implied that God stood in need of the 'tricks of crafty politicians' (IV. 323); and Warburton admits that the wisdom thus displayed was identical in kind, though different in degree, from 'what we call human policy.' He excuses it on the ground that God used his miraculous power as little as possible (a very convenient theological principle), though he is arguing at the same time that all Jewish history is one stupendous miracle. The difficulties, however, increase. After a time God appointed an 'under-agent or instrument;' the Jewish kings became his viceroys; and Warburton has to prove at length that the change did not alter the essence of the form of government. David, he says, was called the man after God's own heart, because he 'seconded God's views in support of the theocracy.' (IV. 312.) He was, in fact, like Lord Bute, a thoroughgoing King's friend. Although the Jews persisted in behaving badly, they could not

withdraw from the covenant, which occupied the place of the original contract in the theocracy; for it is against all principles of equity that one party to a bargain should be allowed to repudiate it at pleasure. God, therefore, retained his rights; but, in consequence of the misbehaviour of his subjects, he declined to exercise them. Thus we have the curious result that, although the theocracy was still existing *de jure*, it ceased to operate *de facto*. Penalties and rewards were no longer exacted in this world, and though no revelation had hitherto been made of a future life, the prophets began to discover its existence. From this fact we may discover, amongst other things, the precise date of the Book of Job. The great purpose of that book is to discuss the difficult problem raised by the prosperity of the wicked and the misfortunes of the virtuous; and, as Warburton says, no satisfactory conclusion is reached. It must therefore have been written just at the point of time when rewards and punishments ceased to be administered in this world, and when the existence of another world failed to obtain recognition. Gradually, however, the new doctrine became clear; till the theocracy was finally broken up, and the Almighty ceased to be, as Warburton calls it, the 'family God of the race of Abraham,' or, as he elsewhere puts it, the 'tutelary deity, gentilitial and local,' and became simply the constitutional ruler of the universe, governing only through second causes and interfering directly only

upon critical occasions. The new set of obligations introduced by the Christian dispensation need not be noticed; but the general nature of the theory is, perhaps, sufficiently clear. Man, it is plain, stands in all kinds of varying relations to his Maker. Some of his claims are dependent upon law, and others upon equity; sometimes he must stick to the terms of a particular bargain, and occasionally he may go upon the general principles of the law of nature; immortality is a free gift (sometimes, it must be said, of very questionable benefit), and may therefore be granted, subject to any regulations which the Giver may please to impose; some kind of future reward is a strict legal right, and must necessarily be granted on condition of repentance; persecution is lawful under a theocracy, and becomes intolerable in all other circumstances where the voice of nature imperatively demands a test-law, but forbids any more stringent discouragement of dissent; eternal punishment is detestably cruel if we depend upon ordinary reasoning, but quite justifiable if it has been the subject of a revelation; and the Jews were governed by God Almighty on principles of (as human intelligence would say) a most eccentric kind, varying naturally at different stages of their history, and totally different from anything that has prevailed before or since. Warburton's modest, though not very orthodox, conclusion, that they could not be adduced as a warning or an example, is amply justified. Mr. Matthew Arnold says that Calvinists

and Arminians think of God as of a man in the next street. Warburton seems to have improved upon the definition, and regarded him as a very shrewd, but rather capricious lawyer, dwelling at about the same distance. Certainly, the attorney's clerk did not lose the marks of his early training.

One other peculiarity of Warburton's theories must be considered, to give anything like a complete picture of the singular logical edifice in which he trusted. Among his innumerable controversies one of the most vehement was his assault upon Wesley. In the course of it he remarks that 'the power of working miracles, and not the conformity of Scripture doctrines to the truth, is the great criterion of a divine mission.' (VIII. 390.) Accordingly we find throughout that he has an intense affection for a miracle, tempered by a strong desire to show that all other people take erroneous views of any particular miracle alleged. In his defence, for example, of the supposed miracle wrought to prevent Julian's reconstruction of the Temple at Jerusalem, he argues valiantly for the truth of the main incident. He is almost equally anxious to prove that certain subsidiary phenomena were not miraculous. For example, it is stated that crosses appeared in the sky and on the garments of the spectators. He produces some curious instances, which I commend to the consideration of natural philosophers, where such crosses are said to have actually appeared in consequence of a thunderstorm and an eruption of

Vesuvius. But the main facts he stoutly maintains must have been miraculous. 'The Fathers,' he says, 'are so impatient to be at their favourite miracles, the crosses in the sky and on the garments, that they slip negligently over what ought principally to have been insisted on, the fiery eruption; and leave what was truly miraculous, to run after an imaginary prodigy.' (VIII. 138.) The poor Fathers who believe too much and the poor infidels who believe too little are equally censured; though it seems rather hard to expect the Fathers to have known of events which happened in the seventeenth century. The same eccentricity appears in his other writings. He seems actually to have believed in an absurd prophecy said to have been uttered by one Arise Evans under the Commonwealth, though he admits the said Evans to have been a notorious rogue; and he published a preface to one of Jortin's works containing an interpretation of its meaning. But when poor Wesley was rash enough to publish those accounts of miracles with which his journals are so curiously stuffed, the episcopal wrath knew no bounds. That a man living in the eighteenth century, and that man a rebel against the Church of England, should produce a few wretched miracles to confirm his foolish fancies was indeed intolerable. To pass over his ridicule, some of which is not unfairly bestowed, or at least would not be unfair in the mouth of a man who had not exaggerated the sphere of the miraculous beyond all other writers,

his ending arguments are exquisitely characteristic. Perhaps the true secret slips out in a very *naïve* remark. Miracles, he says, are no longer required. Something was wanted to support the martyrs in the early ages; 'but now the profession of the Christian faith *is attended with ease and honour;* and the conviction which the weight of human testimony and the conclusions of human reason afford us, of its truth, is abundantly sufficient to support us in our religious perseverance.' (VIII. 319.) It is, in fact, easy enough to persevere when the defence of Christianity is the direct road to a bishopric; but Wesley must have smiled at the quiet assumption that Warburton rather than the poor Methodists presented the closest analogy to the early Christian martyrs. His great argument, however, is even more to the purpose. His treatise on The Doctrine of Grace is, like most others, ambidextrous. He cannot be satisfied unless he is hitting the freethinker with one hand and the enthusiast with the other. Accordingly, he begins by assailing Middleton at great length for having maintained that the gift of tongues was temporary. He argues that, far from disappearing after the first occasion of its manifestation, it persisted through the whole apostolic age. But, having overthrown this antagonist, he is not less vigorous against the other antagonist who goes upon diametrically opposite sentiments. His method is the old and simple one of interpreting a single text of Scripture as if

it were a clause in an Act of Parliament; and, as Wesley had no difficulty in showing in his very calm reply, he violates the sense in the most palpable manner. The decisive passage, he says, is this: 'Charity never faileth; but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.' This passage, after being put through the Warburtonian mill, comes out as follows:—'The virtue of charity is to accompany the Christian Church through all its stages here on earth, whereas the gifts of prophecy, of strange tongues, of supernatural knowledge, are only transitory graces, bestowed upon the Church during its infirm and infant state, to manifest its divine birth and to support it against the delusions of the powers of darkness.' (VIII. 309.) He explains the statement that 'when that which is perfect shall come, then that which is in part shall be done away' in the same spirit; perfection, it appears, being attained when the apostolic age had ceased; and he thus has the pleasure of administering a smart blow in passing at one additional enemy, the unlucky Church of Rome, in whose pretences, he observes, 'the blunder seems to be as glaring as the imposture.' (VIII. 315.) On such grounds the man who held that the whole Jewish history was one continued miracle for many centuries, and who was willing to believe in the absurdities of Arise Evans, denounces Wesley for his folly and impiety in believing that God doubtless

interfered in the eighteenth century as He had done in the first. It would be difficult to find a better explanation of the influence of Wesley than in the contrast thus exhibited between the man who really believed that his creed represented an active and living power, and the man who thought that the same power had left the world to itself for many hundred years, inasmuch as good kings now supplied by patronage the zeal which was formerly produced by miracles.

Yet, in spite of all his unfairness, his coarseness, his paradoxes, and the perverse audacity of his whole writings, I feel a sneaking affection for some of Warburton's productions. He lays about him with such vigour; he tumbles out his miscellaneous reading with such apparent fulness of mind; he ventures so gallantly into the breach to meet any and every assailant; that, though one knows him to be as empty of sound judgment as he is blustering in claiming infallibility, he exercises a kind of queer attraction. The 'Divine Legation' is often intolerably pompous, and often lengthened beyond the endurance of human patience; yet, by judicious skipping, this big book is more endurable than most works of theological controversy; not for its genuine merits, for probably it advances no new proposition which is at once new and true; but from the variety of its contents and the courage of its ingenious blundering. It may be studied with some profit by the lovers of eccentric

productions of the human intellect, and by those who would see an unintentional caricature of the tendencies of the age. Nor is it without some meaning in view of more modern developments of theological reasoning.

Warburton, in fact, was only accepting a compromise characteristic of a certain stage of theological development though he expresses its terms with a clumsy exaggeration peculiar to himself. Any one who now disinters the half-decayed remnants of the English deistic controversy will frequently meet with the same phenomenon. The arguments to be found in their writings are still familiar to us, though now generally disguised in a more pretentious phraseology and enforced by wider knowledge and superior methods of criticism. It is interesting to trace in the first rough sketches of an artist the purpose which is sometimes less distinctly visible in his finished work; and in those comparatively crude attempts to settle the vital problems of theology, whilst we find much that has become obsolete, we gain something by the absence of the more refined artifices employed by later artists in order to deceive the eye and dexterously soften harsh contrasts of opinion. Our ancestors, it may be, had heavy hands and clumsy fingers, but their angular outlines bring out aspects of the truth which are but too easily lost from sight under the vast multiplicity of details added by their successors.

Shaftesbury, Mandeville, and Warburton are fair

representatives of their typical forms of belief, each of which survives under different forms, though neither Shaftesbury's pedantry, nor Mandeville's cynicism, nor Warburton's brutality would be endured at the present day. The long controversies between Protestants and Romanists had died away leaving behind them the natural legacy of scepticism on the one side confronted by dogmatism on the other. Bossuet's 'Histoire des Variations' gives the Catholic conclusion that truth being unattainable by reason, all controversies should be submitted to the infallible tribunal of the Church. Locke's 'Reasonableness of Christianity,' which appeared almost at the same time, represents the more logical and manly conclusion generally accepted by the Protestant writers. From the endless divergence of opinion over which their great adversary triumphed, they inferred that unity was to be reached, not by an appeal to arbitrary authority, but by admitting difference of opinion upon all minor points, and accepting as established only those doctrines which approved themselves to all fair reasoners. The principle was excellent: but the application was difficult. Extend the old Catholic dogma, *Quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus,* by including all Christians under *omnes,* and how stop short of Socinianism? Or admit the ancient philosophers and the Chinese, and pure deism, if even deism must be the final refuge. What is your list of fundamentals? had been the old Romanist taunt; within what sphere is salvation

possible? And Bossuet tries to drive his opponents to the blasphemous and absurd conclusion that heathens and Socinians might escape hell-fire. The proposition intended as a *reductio ad absurdum* was soon accepted as a primary axiom; but the difficulty reccurred in another form. Allow that no sect has a monoply of salvation, and how can it be supposed that it has a monoply of truth? Where is the core of sound doctrine common to all creeds, or is there any core? Stripping off the non-essential dogmas one by one shall we not come to absolute vacancy?

The answer given by the rationalist divines and by such deists as Toland and Tindal was substantially that those doctrines were of universal obligation which were susceptible of a quasi-mathematical demonstration. They endeavoured to construct an absolutely flawless body of doctrine, in which every proportion was deducible by invulnerable reasons from self-evident principles. This system of truth known as the Religion of Nature was admitted on both sides to be demonstrable to all rational beings, and therefore to be universally binding. The divines tried to prove that the revealed followed from the natural religion as an easy corollary; the deists inferred that it was a superfluous excrescence. The doctrine, however, of the two schools was substantially identical. It rested on the basis of a demonstration by abstract reasoning of the existence of God and His attributes, and it really mattered little whether or not some corollaries were added expressed

in Christian phraseology but carefully accommodated to the system of which they were to form a part.

Shaftesbury is the deistical writer who labours most strenuously to breathe some vitality into the theory thus constructed. Throwing as much as possible into obscurity the frigid mathematical formulæ in which Clarke delighted, he succeeds in casting a certain glow of poetical fervour over the barren framework of an abstract theology. He regards nature with at least a fair imitation of the reverence generated by the contemplation of a more accessible Deity. His eloquence, compressed into Pope's brilliant couplets, furnishes a considerable part of the 'Essay on Man' which with all its faults, poetical and philosophical, is perhaps the best statement of the prevalent creed of the day. Such a creed, however ornamented, was not destined to stability. The Deity has become a mere metaphysical abstraction; God is lost in nature, the universal and indifferent, and ceases to take any active part in the world. The supernatural is banished from the universe, and all that remains is a bare code of morality and a vague sentiment of reverence for the absolute and the inconceivable. The central figure retires imperceptibly from Sinai to heaven and from heaven into the boundless spaces of the universe, and theology expires by a gentle euthanasia.

Deism of the constructive kind wanted any true vitality. It disappeared not only from its inherent weakness, but from the gradual decay of its old

metaphysical foundation under the attacks of Locke and his successors. Divines were naturally suspicious of the rival religion of nature which threatened to absorb the religion of revelation and, the general spirit of the century led them to acknowledge the supremacy of Locke. This tendency produced the evidential school, of which Warburton is the most grotesque representative. Without denying the validity of the argument from the internal value of Christianity they yet laid more stress on the historical proof. They still boasted of their rationalism, but endeavoured to depress the claims of so treacherous an ally. Reason was to be admitted to prove the facts, but it played at most a subsidiary part in proving the doctrine, of Christianity; and hence arose Bolingbroke's so-called alliance between the divines and the Atheists which exercised Warburton's whole polemical energy. Though Warburton's wins a verbal, and in this case something more than a verbal, victory, there is a real meaning in Bolingbroke's taunt. The orthodox argument had in part a strangely sceptical colouring. Butler's familiar reasoning is merely a wider application of an often trodden line of defence. The objections to revealed religion were, it was urged, equally applicable to natural religion. The revelations of nature were as partial as the revelations of Jehovah. If the Bible was granted to the Jews alone, a knowledge of natural religion was granted only to a few civilized philosophers. The full expression of this theory resulted in a strange com-

promise. The present was surrendered to the sceptics. It was admitted that no decisive traces of Divine agency could be found in the actually existing world. But whilst this view was admitted, an attempt was made to retain for the believer the dim and remote past. The divines, it may almost be said, maintained whilst the sceptics denied that there was sufficient evidence to prove that there once was a God; and, in the absence of any sufficient evidence to the contrary, it might be assumed that He still existed. The most revolting and the most grotesque results eventually flow from such a divorce between the two worlds. Theology takes a perfectly arbitrary character. Historical evidence may as well prove a supreme devil as a supreme God. The miracles alleged in favour of the existence of Jehovah might have served equally well to prove the existence of Moloch. Orthodox divines such as Waterland, justified the massacre of the Canaanites and other Old Testament atrocities on the simple ground that God might do as he liked with his own. Now, as everything is his and as we have no independent means of judging of his opinions, any action justified by miracles is unimpeachable. Many of the arguments thus advanced read like satire; and Voltaire has only to repeat Waterland and to add a covert sneer to convert the apologist into the bitterest enemy of the Jewish theology.

Warburton, with his audacity in proclaiming as dis-

coveries what others would take to be a *reductio ad absurdum* of his theory, gives the most singular development to this mode of reasoning. He explicitly avows the doctrine that there is no common measure between the past and the present. God, according to him, was once the ruler of a class and has now become governor of the universe. The Jews really lived in a world so unlike to this, that no argument can be drawn from one to the other. Such doctrines and the odd corollaries of which I have given some specimens, may be made to correspond roughly to the sceptical view by applying to opinions what is said of facts. He argues like a caricatured positivist who should maintain that the world was once ruled by fetishes, afterwards by a number of gods, and then by one supreme God. Substantially admitting that the old conceptions were unworthy of acceptance in modern times, he yet maintains that they once corresponded to an objective reality. He calmly contradicts the fundamental canon of historical criticism which asserts that the laws now operative in the world operated through the whole period under observation. The fallacy is, of course, now easy of detection and represents the extreme point reached by a hopeless attempt at putting together two incoherent systems. Faith and reason can no more divide the world in time than they divide the existing world into two different spheres. And yet it would be easy to show that the same fallacy

prevails in most modern theology; and that men familiar with modern criticism still cover under philosophical language about the education of the race, a theory that the Divine government was somehow or other very different 2,000 or 3,000 years ago, from what it is now. The doctrine of catastrophes lingers in theology though it is being expelled from geology. Nature, it was once supposed, worked in primitive times by convulsions, and now by the slow operation of less energetic forces; and so Warburton believed in a God who was once a despot, enforcing his commands by miracles, and who had now become a constitutional King relying chiefly on the influence of Church preferment.

The great reaction against this mechanical system of which Wesley was the mouthpiece, asserted the continued action of the Deity upon the world and the souls of men, but it was a creation rather of sentiment than of reason; and left no trace on the intellectual development of the time. That which Mandeville represented was the conclusion of the ordinary rough common sense of mankind. Agreeing with Warburton in denying the validity of the deistic interpretation of existing facts, he saw no use in cumbering his mind with outworn fables about the 'gentilitial deity' of a barbarous clan. His protest against Shaftesbury and his like, cynical as it is, yet involves the eternal truth that men cannot live upon moonshine alone. Un-

fortunately he accepted the alternative, that man could live contentedly upon garbage. But it was inevitable that a complete scepticism, not only as to dogmatic theologies, but as to all the ennobling beliefs with which theology had been associated, should be the result of setting up so withered an idol for the worship of mankind.

CHAPTER IX.

AN APOLOGY FOR PLAINSPEAKING.

ALL who would govern their intellectual course by no other aim than the discovery of truth, and who would use their faculty of speech for no other purpose than open communications of their real opinions to others are met by protests from various quarters. Such protests so far as they imply cowardice or dishonesty, must of course be disregarded, but it would be most erroneous to confound all protests in the same summary condemnation. Reverent and kindly minds shrink from giving an unnecessary shock to the faith which comforts many sorely tried souls; and even the most genuine lovers of truth may doubt whether the time has come at which the decayed scaffolding can be swept away without injuring the foundations of the edifice. Some reserve, they think, is necessary, though reserve, as they must admit, passes but too easily into insincerity.

And thus, it is often said by one class of thinkers, Why attack a system of beliefs which is crumbling away quite fast enough without your help? Why,

says another class, try to shake beliefs which, whether true or false, are infinitely consoling to the weaker brethren? I will endeavour to conclude these essays, in which I have possibly made myself liable to some such remonstrances by explaining why I should think it wrong to be bound by them; I will, however, begin by admitting frankly that I recognise their force so far as this; namely, that I have no desire to attack wantonly any sincere beliefs in minds unprepared for the reception of more complete truths. This book, perhaps, would be unjustifiable if it were likely to become a text-book for schoolgirls in remote country parsonages. But it is not very probable that it will penetrate to such quarters; nor do I flatter myself that I have brought forward a single argument which is not already familiar to educated men. Whatever force there may be in its pages is only the force of an appeal to people who already agree in my conclusions to state their agreement in plain terms; and, having said this much, I will answer the questions suggested as distinctly as I am able.

To the first question, why trouble the last moments of a dying creed, my reply would be in brief that I do not desire to quench the lingering vitality of the dying so much as to lay the phantoms of the dead. I believe that one of the greatest dangers of the present day is the general atmosphere of insincerity in such matters, which is fast producing a scepticism not as to any or all theologies, but as to the very existence of

intellectual good faith. Destroy credit, and you ruin commerce; destroy all faith in religious honesty and you ruin something of infinitely more importance than commerce; ideas should surely be preserved as carefully as cotton from the poisonous influences of a varnish intended to fit them for public consumption. 'The time is come,' says Mr. Mill in his autobiography, 'in which it is the duty of all qualified persons to speak their minds about popular religious beliefs.' The reason which he assigns is that they would thus destroy the 'vulgar prejudice' that unbelief is connected with bad qualities of head and heart. It is, I venture to remark, still more important to destroy the belief of sceptics themselves that in these matters a system of pious frauds is creditable or safe. Effeminating and corrupting as all equivocation comes to be in the long run, there are other evils behind. Who can see without impatience the fearful waste of good purpose and noble aspiration caused by our reticence at a time when it is of primary importance to turn to account all the forces which make for the elevation of mankind? How much intellect and zeal runs to waste in the spasmodic effort of good men to cling to the last fragments of decaying systems, to galvanise dead formulæ into some dim semblance of life! Society will not improve as it might when those who should be leaders of progress are staggering backwards and forwards with their eyes passionately reverted to the past. Nay, we shall never be duly sensitive to the

miseries and cruelties which make the world a place of torture for so many, so long as men are encouraged in the name of religion to look for a remedy not in fighting against surrounding evils, but in cultivating aimless contemplations of an imaginary ideal. Much of our popular religion seems to be expressly directed to deaden our sympathies with our fellow men by encouraging an indolent optimism; our thoughts of the other world are used in many forms as an opiate to drug our minds with indifference to the evils of this; and the last word of half our preachers is, dream rather than work.

To the other question, Why deprive men of their religious consolations? I must make a rather longer reply. In the first place, I must observe that the burden of proof does not rest with me. If any one should tell me explicitly, a certain dogma is false, but it is better not to destroy it, I would not reply summarily that he is preaching a grossly immoral doctrine; but I would only refrain from the reply because I should think that he does not quite mean what he says. His real intention, I should suppose, would be to say that every dogma includes some truth, or is inseparably associated with true statements, and that I ought to be careful not to destroy the wheat with the tares. The presumption remains, at any rate, that a false doctrine is so far mischievous; and its would-be protector is bound to show that it is impossible to assail it without striking through its sides at something

beyond. If Christ is not God, the man who denies him to be God is certainly *primâ facie* right, though it may perhaps be possible to show that such a denial cannot be made in practice without attacking a belief in morality. We may, or it is possible to assert that we may, be under this miserable necessity, that we cannot speak undiluted truth; truth and falsehood are, it is perhaps maintainable, so intricately blended in the world that discrimination is impossible. Still the man who argues thus is bound to assign some grounds for his melancholy scepticism; and to show further that the destruction of the figment is too dearly bought by the assertion of the truth. Therefore I might be content to say that, in such cases, the innocence of the plain speaker ought to be assumed until his guilt is demonstrated. If we had always waited to clear away shams till we were certain that our action would produce absolutely unmixed benefits, we should still be worshipping Mumbo-Jumbo.

But, whilst claiming the advantage of this presumption, I am ready to meet the objector on his own ground, and to indicate, simply and inefficiently enough, the general nature of the reasons which convince me that the objection could not be sustained. To what degree, in fact, are these sham beliefs which undoubtedly prevail so widely, a real comfort to any intelligent person? Many believers have described the terrible agony with which they had at one period of their lives listened to the first whisperings of

scepticism. The horror with which they speak of the gulf after managing to struggle back to the right side is supposed to illustrate the cruelty of encouraging others to take the plunge. That such sufferings are at times very real and very acute, is undeniable; and yet I imagine that few who have undergone them would willingly have missed the experience. I venture even to think that the recollection is one of unmixed pain only in those cases in which the sufferer has a half-consciousness that he has not escaped by legitimate means. If in his despair he has clutched at a lie in order to extricate himself as quickly as possible and at any price, it is no wonder that he looks back with a shudder. When the disease has been driven inwards by throwing in abundant doses of Paley, Butler, with perhaps an oblique reference to preferment and respectability, it continues to give many severe twinges, and perhaps it may permanently injure the constitution. But, if it has been allowed to run its natural course, and the sufferer has resolutely rejected every remedy except fair and honest argument, I think that the recovery is generally cheering. A man looks back with something of honest pride at the obstacles through which he has forced his way to a purer and healthier atmosphere. But, whatever the nature of such crises generally, there is an obvious reason why, at the present day, the process is seldom really painful. The change which takes place is not, in fact, an abandonment of beliefs

seriously held and firmly implanted in the mind, but a gradual recognition of the truth that you never really held them. The old husk drops off because it has long been withered, and you discover that beneath is a sound and vigorous growth of genuine conviction. Theologians have been assuring you that the world would be intolerably hideous if you did not look through their spectacles. With infinite pains you have turned away your eyes from the external light. It is with relief, not regret, that you discover that the sun shines, and that the world is beautiful without the help of these optical devices which you had been taught to regard as essential.

This, of course, is vehemently denied by all orthodox persons; and the hesitation with which the heterodox impugn their assumption seems to testify to its correctness. 'After all,' the believer may say, with much appearance of truth, 'you don't really believe that I can walk by myself, if you are so tender of removing my crutches.' The taunt is fair enough, and should be fairly met. Cynicism and infidelity are supposed to be inseparably connected; it is assumed that nobody can attack the orthodox creed unless he is incapable of sympathising with the noblest emotions of our nature. The adversary on purely intellectual grounds would be awed into silence by its moral beauty, unless he were deficient in reverence, purity, and love. It must therefore be said, distinctly, although it cannot be argued at length, that this

ground also appears to me to be utterly untenable. I deny that it is impossible to speak the truth without implying a falsehood; and I deny equally that it is impossible to speak the truth without drying up the sources of our holiest feelings. Those who maintain the affirmative of those propositions appear to me to be the worst of sceptics, and they would certainly reduce us to the most lamentable of dilemmas. If we cannot develop our intellects but at the price of our moral nature, the case is truly hard. Some such conclusion is hinted by Roman Catholics, but I do not understand how any one raised under Protestant teaching should regard it as anything but cowardly and false. Let me endeavour in the briefest possible compass to say why, as a matter of fact, the dilemma seems to me to be illusory. What is it that Christian theology can now do for us; and in what way does it differ from the teaching of free thought?

The world, so far as our vision extends, is full of evil. Life is a sore burden to many, and a scene of unmixed happiness to none. It is useless to enquire whether on the whole the good or the evil is the most abundant, or to decide whether to make such an enquiry be anything else than to ask whether the world has been, on the whole, arranged to suit our tastes. The problem thus presented is utterly inscrutable on every hypothesis. Theology is as impotent in presence of it as science. Science, indeed, withdraws at once from such questions; whilst theology

asks us to believe that this 'sorry scheme of things' is the work of omnipotence guided by infinite benevolence. This certainly makes the matter no clearer, if it does not raise additional difficulties; and, accordingly, we are told that the existence of evil is a mystery. In any case, we are brought to a stand: and the only moral which either science or theology can give is that we should make the best of our position.

Theology, however, though it cannot explain, or can only give verbal explanations, can offer a consolation. This world, we are told, is not all; there is a beyond and a hereafter; we may hope for an eternal life under conditions utterly inconceivable, though popular theology has made a good many attempts to conceive them. If it were further asserted that this existence would be one of unmixed happiness, there would be at least a show of compensation. But, of course, that is what no theologian can venture to say. It is needless to recall the Puritan divine, with his babes of a span long now lying in hell, or that Romanist priest who revels in describing the most fiendish torture inflicted upon children by the merciful Creator who made them and exposed them to evil, or any other of the wild and hideous phantasms that have been evoked by the imagination of mankind running riot in the world of arbitrary figments. Nor need we dwell upon the fact, that where theology is really

vigorous it produces such nightmares by an inevitable law; inasmuch as the next world can be nothing but the intensified reflection of this. It is enough to say that, if the revelation of a future state be really the great claim of Christianity upon our attentions, the use which it has made of that state has been one main cause of its decay. 'St. Lewis the king, having sent Ivo, Bishop of Chartres, on an embassy, the bishop met a woman on the way, grave, sad, fantastic, and melancholic; with fire in one hand and water in the other. He asked what those symbols meant. She answered, "My purpose is with fire to burn Paradise, and with my water to quench the flames of hell, that men may serve God without the incentives of hope and fear, and purely for the love of God."' 'The woman,' adds Jeremy Taylor, 'began at the wrong end.' Is that so clear? The attempts of priests to make use of the keys of heaven and hell brought about the moral revolt of the Reformation; and, at the present day, the disgust excited by the doctrine of everlasting damnation is amongst the strongest motives to popular infidelity; all able apologists feel the strain. Some reasoners quibble about everlasting and eternal; and the great Catholic logician 'submits the whole subject to the theological school,' a process which I do not quite understand, though I assume it to be consolatory. The doctrine, in short, can hardly be made tangible without shocking men's con-

sciences and understandings. It ought, it may be, to be attractive, but when firmly grasped, it becomes incredible and revolting.

The difficulty is evaded in two ways. Some amiable and heterodox sects retain heaven and abolish hell. A kingdom in the clouds may, of course, be portioned off according to pleasure. The doctrine, however, is interesting in an intellectual point of view only as illustrating in the naïvest fashion the common fallacy of confounding our wishes with our beliefs. The argument that because evil and good are mixed wherever we can observe, therefore there is elsewhere unmixed good, does not obey any recognised canons of induction. It would certainly be pleasant to believe that everybody was going to be happy for ever, but whether such a belief would be favourable to that stern sense of evil which should fit us to fight the hard battle of this life is a question too easily answered. Thinkers of a higher order do not have recourse to these simple devices. They retain the doctrine as a protest against materialism, but purposely retain it in the vaguest possible shape. They say that this life is not all; if it were all, they argue, we should be rightly ruled by our stomachs; but they scrupulously decline to give form and substance to their anticipations. We must, they think, have avowedly a heavenly background to the world, but our gaze should be restricted habitually within the visible horizon. The future life is to tinge the general atmosphere, but not to be offered

as a definite goal of action or a distinct object of contemplation.

The persons against whom, so far as I know, the charge of materialism can be brought with the greatest plausibility at the present day are those who still force themselves to bow before the most grossly material symbols, and give a physical interpretation to the articles of her creed. A man who proposes to look for God in this miserable world and finds Him visiting the diseased imagination of a sickly nun, may perhaps be in some sense called a materialist, and there is more materialism of this variety in popular sentimentalisms about the 'blood of Jesus' than in all the writings of the profane men of science. But in a philosophical sense the charge rests on a pure misunderstanding.

The man of science or, in other words, the man who most rigidly confines his imagination within the bounds of the knowable, is every whit as ready to protest against 'materialism' as his antagonist. Those who distinguish man into two parts, and give the higher qualities to the soul and the sensual to the body, assume that all who reject their distinction abolish the soul, and with it abolish all that is not sensual. Yet every genuine scientific thinker believes in the existence of love and reverence as he believes in any other facts, and is likely to set just as high a value upon them as his opponent. He believes equally with his opponent, that to cultivate the higher emotions, man must habitually attach himself to

objects outside the narrow sphere of his own personal experience. The difference is that whereas one set of thinkers would tell us to fix our affections on a state entirely disparate from that in which we are actually placed, the other would concentrate them upon objects which form part of the series of events amongst which we are moving. Which is the most likely to stimulate our best feelings? We must reply by asking whether the vastness or the distinctness of a prospect has the greatest effect upon the imagination. Does a man take the greatest intèrest in a future which he can definitely interpret to himself, or upon one which is admittedly so inconceivable that it is wrong to dwell upon it, but which allows of indefinite expansion? Putting aside our own personal interest, do we care more for the fate of our grandchildren whom we shall never see, or for the condition of spiritual beings the conditions of whose existence are utterly unintelligible to us? If, sacrifice of our lower pleaures be demanded, should we be more willing to make them in order that a coming generation may be emancipated from war and pauperism, or in order that some indefinite and indefinable change may be worked in a world utterly inscrutable to our imaginations? The man who has learnt to transfer his aspirations from the next world to this, to look forward to the diminution of disease and vice here, rather than to the annihilation of all physical conditions, has, it is hardly rash to assert, gained more in the distinctness of his aims than he has lost (if indeed he has lost anything) in their elevation.

Were it necessary to hunt out every possible combination of opinion, I should have to inquire whether the doctrine of another world might not be understood in such a sense as to involve no distortion of our views. The future world may be so arranged that the effect of the two sets of motives upon our minds may be always coincident. Our interest in our descendants might be strengthened without being distracted by a belief in our own future existence. Of such a theory I have now only space to say that it is not that which really occurs in practice: and that the instincts which make us cling to a vivid belief in the future always spring from a vehement revolt against the present. Meanwhile, however, the answers generally given to sceptics are apparently contradictory. To limit our hopes to this world, it is sometimes said, is to encourage mere grovelling materialism; in the same breath it is added that to ask for an interest in the fate of our fellow creatures here, instead of ourselves hereafter, is to make excessive demands upon human selfishness. The doctrine it seems is at once too elevated and too grovelling.

The theory upon which the latter charge rests seems to be that you can take an interest in yourself at any distance, but not in others if they are outside the circle of your own personality. This doctrine, when boldly expressed, seems to rest upon the very apotheosis of selfishness. Theologians have sometimes said, in perfect consistency, that it would be better for

the whole race of man to perish in torture than that a single sin should be committed. One would rather have thought that a man had better be damned a thousand times over than allow of such a catastrophe; but, however this may be, the doctrine now suggested appears to be equally revolting, unless diluted so far as to be meaningless. It amounts to asserting that our love of our own infinitesimal individuality is so powerful that any matter in which we are personally concerned has a weight altogether incommensurable with that of any matter in which we have no concern. People who hold such a doctrine would be bound in consistency to say that they would not cut off their little finger to save a million of men from torture after their own death. Every man must judge of his own state of mind; though there is nothing on which people are more liable to make mistakes; and I am charitable enough to hope that the actions of such men would be in practice as different as possible from what they anticipate in theory. But it is enough to say that experience, if it proves anything, proves this to be an inaccurate view of human nature. All the threats of theologians with infinite stores of time and torture to draw upon, failed to wean men from sins which gave them a passing gratification, even when faith was incomparably stronger than it is now, or is likely to be again. One reason, doubtless, is that the conscience is as much blunted by the doctrines of repentance and absolution as it is stimulated by the threats

of hell fire. But is it not contrary to all common sense to expect that the motive will retain any vital strength when the very people who rely upon it admit that it rests on the most shadowy of grounds? The other motive, which is supposed to be so incomparably weaker that it cannot be used as a substitute, has yet proved its strength in every age of the world. As our knowledge of nature and the growth of our social development impress upon us more strongly every day that we live the close connection in which we all stand to each other, the intimate 'solidarity' of all human interests, it is not likely to grow weaker; a young man will break a blood-vessel for the honour of a boatclub; a savage will allow himself to be tortured to death for the credit of his tribe; why should it be called visionary to believe that a civilised human being will make personal sacrifices for the benefit of men whom he has perhaps not seen, but whose intimate dependence upon himself, he realises at every moment of his life? May not such a motive generate a predominant passion with men framed to act upon it by a truly generous system of education? And is it not an insult to our best feelings and a most audacious feat of logic, to declare on *à priori* grounds that such feelings must be a straw in the balance when weighed against our own personal interest in the fate of a being whose nature is inconceivable to us, whose existence is not certain, whose dependence upon us is indeterminate, simply because it is said that, in some way or other, it and we are continuous?

The real meaning, however, of this clinging to another life is doubtless very different. It is simply an expression of the reluctance of the human being to use the awful word 'never.' As the years take from us, one by one, all that we have loved, we try to avert our gaze; we are fain to believe that in some phantom world all will be given back to us, and that our toys have only been laid by in the nursery upstairs. Who, indeed, can deny that to give up these dreams involves a cruel pang? But, then, who but the most determined optimist can deny that a cruel pang is inevitable? Is not the promise too shadowy to give us real satisfaction? The whole lesson of our lives is summed up in teaching us to say 'never' without needless flinching or, in other words, in submitting to the inevitable. The theologian bids us repent, and waste our lives in vain regrets for the past, and in tremulous hopes that the past may yet be the future. Science tells us—what, indeed, we scarcely need to learn from science—that what is gone, is gone, and that the best wisdom of life is the acceptance of accomplished facts.

> The moving finger writes, and having writ
> Moves on, nor all your pity nor wit
> Can move it back to cancel half a line,
> Nor all your tears wash out a word of it.

Never repent, unless by repentance you mean drawing lessons from past experience. Beating against the bars of fate you will only wound yourself, and mar what yet remains to you. Grief for the past is useful

so far as it can be transmuted into renewed force for the future. The love of those we have lost may enable us to love better those who remain, and those who are to come. So used, it is an infinitely precious possession, and to be cherished with all our hearts. As it leads to vain regrets, it is at best an enervating enjoyment, and a needless pain. The figments of theology are a consecration of our delusive dreams; the teaching of the new faith should be the utilisation of every emotion to the bettering of the world of the future.

The ennobling element of the belief in a future life is beyond the attack, or rather is strengthened by the aid, of science. Science, like theology, bids us look beyond our petty personal interests, and cultivate faculties other than the digestive. Theology aims at stimulating the same instincts, but provides them with an object in some shifting cloudland of the imagination instead of the definite *terra firma* of this tangible earth. The imagination, bound by no external laws, may form what rules it pleases, and may therefore lend itself to a refined selfishness, or to dreamy sentimentalism. When we rise beyond ourselves we are most in need of some definite guidance, and in the greatest danger of following some delusive phantom. The process illustrated by this case is operative throughout the whole sphere of religious thought. The essence of theology, as popularly understood, is the division of the universe into two utterly disparate elements. God is

conceived as a ruler external to the ordinary series of phenomena, but intervening at more or less frequent intervals; between the natural and the supernatural, the human and the divine element, there can be no proper comparison. Man must be vile that God may be exalted; reason must be folly when put beside revelation; the force of man must be weakness when it encounters Providence. Wherever, in short, we recognise the Divine hand, we can but prostrate ourselves in humble adoration. In franker times, when people meant what they said, this creed was followed to its logical results. The dogmas of the literal inspiration of the Scripture, or of the infallibility of the Church, recognised the presence of a flawless perfection in the midst of utter weakness. The corruption of human nature, the irresistible power of Divine grace, the magical efficacy of the Sacraments are corollaries from the same theory. In the phraseology popular with a modern school, we are told that the essence of Christianity is the belief in the fatherhood of God. That doctrine is intelligible and may be beautiful so long as we retain a sufficient degree of anthropomorphism. But as our conceptions of the universe and, therefore, of its ruler are elevated, we too often feel that the use of the word 'father' does not prevent the weight of his hand from crushing us. If noble souls can convert even suffering into useful discipline, it is but a flimsy optimism which covers all suffering by the name of paternal chastisement.

The universe partitioned between infinite power and infinite weakness becomes a hopeless chaos; and when we proceed further, and try to identify the Divine and the human elements amidst this intricate blending of good and evil we are in danger of vital error at every step. What, in fact, can be more disastrous, and yet more inevitable, than to mistake our corrupt instincts for the voice of God, or, on the other hand, to condemn the Divine intimations as sinful? How can we avoid at every instant committing the unpardonable sin of blasphemy against the ineffable Holiness? And if, indeed, the distinction be groundless, are we not of necessity dislocating our conceptions of the universe, and hopelessly perplexing our sense of duty?

Take, for instance one common topic which is typical of the general process. Divines never tire of holding up to us the example of Christ. If Christ were indeed a man like ourselves, his example may be fairly quoted. We willingly place him in the very front rank of the heroes who have died for the good of our race. But if Christ were in any true sense God or inseparably united to God, the example disappears. We honour him because he endured agonies and triumphed over doubts and weaknesses that would have paralyzed a less noble soul. The agonies and the doubts and the weakness are unintelligible on the hypothesis of an incarnate God. Theologians escape by the old loophole of mystery, ordinary believers by thinking of Christ as man and God alternately. We can

doubtless deceive ourselves by such juggling, but we cannot honestly escape from the inevitable dilemma. In paying a blasphemous reverence to Christ, theologians have either placed him beyond the reach of our sympathies, or have lowered God to the standard of humanity. Let us, if possible, dwell with an emotion of brotherly love on the sufferings of every martyr in the cause of humanity, but you sever the very root of our sympathy when you single out one as divine and raise him to the skies. Why stand we gazing into heaven when we have but to look round to catch the contagion of noble enthusiasm from men of our own race? The ideal becomes meaningless when it is made supernatural.

The same perplexity meets us at every step; we are to follow Christ's example. Be humble, it is said, as Christ was humble. Theology indeed would prescribe annihilation rather than humiliation. Man in presence of the Infinite is absolutely nothing. Science, according to a glib commonplace of popular writers, agrees with theology in prescribing humility. But that very ambiguous word has a totally different meaning in the two cases. Science bids us recognize the inevitable limitation of our powers, and the feebleness of any individual as compared with the mass. We can do but little: and at every step we are dependent upon the co-operation of countless millions of our race and an indefinite series of past generations. We are like the coral insects, who can add but a hair's breadth to the structure which

has been raised by their predecessors. Yet the little which we can do is something; and we will neither degrade ourselves nor our race. As measured by an absolute standard, man may be infinitesimal, but the absolute is beyond our powers. Science tells us that our little individuality might be swept out of existence without appreciable injury to the world; but it adds that the world is built up of infinitesimal atoms and that each must co-operate in the general result. Theology crushes us into nothingness by placing us in the presence of the infinite God; and then compensates by making us divine ourselves. Man is a mere worm, but he can by priestly magic bring God to earth; he is hopelessly ignorant, but set on a throne and properly manipulated he becomes an infallible vice-God; he is a helpless creature, and yet this creature can define with more than scientific accuracy the precise nature of his inconceivable Creator: he grovels on the ground as a miserable sinner and stands up to declare that he is the channel of Divine inspiration; all his wisdom is ignorance, but he has written one book of which every line is absolutely perfect: and meanwhile that which one man singles out as the Divine element is to another the diabolical, so strangely dim is our vision, and so imperceptible is the difference between the Infinite and the infinitesimal.

Or, again, we are to deny ourselves as Christ denied himself. But what are the limits and the purpose of this self-denial? Am I to carry on an indefinite war-

fare against the body, which you say that God has given me, and to crush the physical for the sake of the spiritual element? What is the line between the spirit which is of God, and the body which is hopelessly corrupt? All sound reasoning prescribes a training with the given purpose of bringing the instincts of the individual into harmony with the interests of the whole social organism. Theology trying to lay down an absolute law sometimes encourages the extremes of asceticism; sometimes it inclines to antinomianism, and sometimes sanctions the condonation of sin in consideration of acts of humiliation.

We are to resign ourselves to God's will, say theologians, but what is God's will? If it is the inevitable, then theology falls in with free reason. But if God's will be, as theologians maintain, something which we are at liberty to resist or to obey, then resignation implies our ignoble yielding to evils which might be extirpated. Theology deifies the force of circumstances, when our life should be a victory over circumstances, and encourages us to repine over misfortunes, where all repining is useless.

Christ, you say, died for us; and Butler, in the book which still receives more praise than any other attempt at reconciling philosophy and theology, tries to show that here, at least, the two doctrines are in harmony. He has probably produced, in men of powerful intellects, more atheism than he has cured; for he tries to demonstrate explicitly what is tacitly assumed by most

theologians—the injustice of God. The doctrine may be horrible, but he says that facts prove it to be true. His whole logic consists in simply begging the question by calling suffering, punishment. That the potter should be angry with his pots is certainly inconceivable; but when you once attempt to trace the supernatural in life, it undoubtedly follows that God is not only weak with the creatures he has made, but punishes the innocent for the guilty. Theologians may rest complacently in such a conclusion; to unprejudiced persons, it appears to be the clearest illustration of the futility of their theories. Free thought declines to call suffering a punishment; but it admits and turns to account the undoubted fact, that men are so closely connected, that every injury inflicted upon one is inevitably propagated to others. If morality be the science of minimizing human misery, to say that sin brings suffering, is merely to express an identical proposition. The lesson, however, remains for us that we should look beyond our petty, personal interests, because no act can be merely personal. The stone which we throw spreads widening circles to all eternity, and to realise that fact is to intensify the sense of responsibility; but the same doctrine translated into the theological dialect becomes shocking or 'mysterious.'

Finally, we are to love our brothers as Christ loved us. That, truly, is an excellent doctrine, but translated into the theological, does it not lose half its

efficacy? Love them that are of the household is the more natural corollary from the Christian tenets than love all mankind. People sometimes express surprise that the mild doctrines of Christianity should be pressed into the service of persecution. What more natural? 'We love you,' says the theologian to the heathen, 'but still you are children of the devil. We love men, but the human heart is desperately wicked. We love your souls, but we hate your bodies. We love you as brothers; but then God, who so loved the world as to give His Son to die for it, has left the vast majority to follow their own road to perdition, and given to us a monopoly of truth and grace. We can only follow His example, and adore the mysterious dispensations of Providence.'

'Ah!' replies a different school, 'that is indeed a blasphemous and hideous doctrine. We will not presume to divide the human from the divine. God is the father of all men; His grace is confined to no sect or creed. His revelation is made to the universal human heart as well as to a select number of prophets and apostles. He is known in the order of nature as well as by miracles. The body has been created by Him as well as the soul, and all instincts are of heavenly origin and require cultivation not extirpation.'

Whether this doctrine is reconcilable with Christianity is a question not to be discussed here. It certainly does not imply those flat contradictions of the lessons of experience which emerge from the other method of

thought. It asks us to believe no miracles. It involves no supernaturalism. Whatever is, is natural, and is at the same time divine. Stated, indeed, as a bare logical formula, the doctrine seems to elude our grasp. It is intelligible to say that Christ was divine and Mahomet human, for the statement implies a comparison between two different terms; but if you say that Christ and Mahomet are both of the same class, what does it matter whether you call them both divine or both human? Every logical statement implies an exclusion as well as inclusion. To say that A is B is meaningless if you add that every other conceivable letter is also B. You attempt to make everybody rich by reckoning their property in pence instead of pounds, and the process, though at first sight attractive, is unsatisfactory. In fact, this phase of opinion generally slips back into the preceding. We find that exceptions are insensibly made, and that after pronouncing nature to be divine, it is tacitly assumed there is an indefinite region which is somehow outside nature. Few people have the reasoning tendency sufficiently developed to follow out this view to its logical result in Pantheism. Yet short of that, there is no really stable resting-place.

Let us glance, however, for a moment at the ordinary application of the doctrine. The theologian agrees with the man of science in admitting that we are governed by unalterable laws, or, as the man of science prefers to say, that the world shows nothing

but a series of invariable sequences, and coexistences. The difference is, in other words, that the theologian puts a legislator behind the laws, whilst the man of science sees nothing behind them but impenetrable mystery. The difference, so far as any practical conclusions are concerned, is obviously nothing. The laws of Nature, you tell us, are the work of infinite goodness and wisdom. But we are utterly unable to say what infinite goodness and wisdom would do, except by showing what it has done. Therefore, the ultimate appeal of the theologian, is as unequivocally to the laws as the primary appeal of the man of science. He has made a show of going to a higher court only to be referred back again to the original tribunal. History, for example, shows that mankind blunders by degrees into an improved condition and calls the process, progress. Theology can give no additional guarantee for progress, for a state of things once compatible may, for anything we can say, always remain compatible with infinite wisdom and goodness. As a matter of historical fact, theology only suggested the dogma of man's utter vileness, and all genuine theologians are marked by their readiness to believe in deterioration instead of progress. They look forwards to a future world instead of this. But what reason have they to believe in this future of blessedness? God's love for his creatures? But the most prominent fact written on the whole surface of the world is what we cannot help calling the reckless and profuse waste of

life. If everything we see teaches us that millions of individuals are crushed at every step by the progress of the race, and if that process is, as it must be, compatible with infinite goodness, why suppose that infinite goodness will act differently in future? It is an ever-recurring but utterly fruitless sophistry which first infers God from nature, and then pronounces God to be different from nature.

The only meaning, indeed, which can be given to the theological statement when thus interpreted is that we should accustom ourselves to look with reverence and love upon the universe. That love and reverence are emotions which deserve our most strenuous efforts at cultivation; that we should be profoundly impressed by the vast system of which we form an infinitesimal part; that we should habitually think of ourselves in relation to the long perspective of events which stretches far away from us to the dim distance and towards the invisible future, are indeed lessons which all sound reasoning tends to confirm. But when we are invited to love and wonder at the world, as the work of God, we must guard against the old trick of substitution which is constantly played upon us. Once more, the God of nature is turned into the God of a part of nature. Theology of the old stamp, so far from encouraging us to love nature, teaches us that it is under a curse. It teaches us to look upon the animal creation with shuddering disgust; upon the whole race of man, outside our narrow sect, as

delivered over to the devil; and upon the laws of nature at large as a temporary mechanism, in which we have been caught, but from which we are to anticipate a joyful deliverance. It is science, not theology, which has changed all this; it is the atheists, infidels, and rationalists, as they are kindly called, who have taught us to take fresh interest in our poor fellow denizens of the world, and not to despise them because Almighty benevolence could not be expected to admit them to heaven; to the same teaching we owe the recognition of the noble aspirations embodied in every form of religion, and the destruction of the ancient monopoly of Divine influences; and it is science again that has taught us to accommodate ourselves to the laws in which we are placed, instead of fruitlessly struggling against them and invoking miraculous interference to conquer them. The theology of which I am now speaking, differs, indeed, radically from the old, so radically that one is at times surprised that the agreement, to use a common word, should reconcile vital differences in faith. But it often tends to the same end by a different path. It attempts to deny the existence of evils, instead of proclaiming their ultimate destruction. Everything comes from a paternal hand; why struggle against it? Disease and starvation and nakedness are, somehow or other, parts of a divine system which is somehow or other deserving of our sincerest adoration. If anybody who is in fact naked or sick or starving takes that phrase in

the sense that he had better submit cheerfully to evils which he cannot help, there is little to be said against it. If the doctrine of the Divine origin of all things is compatible with the belief that a vast number of things are utterly hateful, that we ought to spend our whole energy in eradicating them, and to protest against them with our latest breath, then the doctrine is certainly innocuous. But whether there is much use in language thus employed seems a little questionable; and, in any case, it is clear that it really adds nothing, except words, to the teaching of science.

Here again people cling passionately to the old formulæ because they appear to sanction a soothing optimism. We cannot be happy, it is said, unless we believe that our wishes will be fulfilled; and we endeavour to convert our wishes into a guarantee for their own fulfilment. If we cannot make up our minds to say 'never,' neither can we resolve to admit that there is really evil. We passionately assert that the past will come back and that pain will turn out to be an illusion. The argument against the infidel comes essentially to this: you tell me that my hopes will not be realized, and therefore you make me necessarily and needlessly miserable. For God's sake, do not disperse my dreams. People are not satisfied with the answer that the nightmare has gone as well as the vision of bliss, and that fears are destroyed as much as hopes; because, as a matter of fact, they can contrive to dwell upon that part of the doctrine which

is comfortable for the moment. We have power over our dreams though we conceal its exercise from ourselves. But the argument itself involves the fundamental fallacy. To destroy a groundless hope is not to destroy a man's happiness. The instantaneous effort may be painful: but it is the price which we have to pay for a cure of deep-seated complaints. The infidel's reply is substantially this: I may destroy your hopes; but I do not destroy your power of hoping: I bid you no longer fix your mind on a chimera but on tangible and realisable prospects. I warn you that efforts to soar above the atmosphere can only lead to disappointment and that time spent in squaring the circle is simply time spent. Apply your strength and your intellect on matters which lie at hand and on problems which admit of a solution. The happiest man is not the man who has the grandest dreams but the man whose aspirations are best fitted to guide his talents: the most efficient worker is not the one who mistakes his own fancies for an external support but he who has most accurately gauged the conditions under which he is labouring. Trust in Providence may lead you to pass successfully through dangers which would have repelled an unbeliever, or it may lead you to break your neck in pursuing a dream. It makes heroes and cowards, patriots and assassins, saints and bigots who each mistake their wisdom or their folly for divine intimations. Providence for us can only be that aggregate of external forces to which willingly or un-

willingly we must adapt ourselves. We should calmly calculate by all available means the conditions of our life, and then dare, without ignoring, the dangers that are inevitable. Through all human affairs there runs an element of uncertainty which cannot be suppressed, and we seek in vain to disguise it under names consecrated by old associations; there are evils which are only made more poignant by our efforts to explain them away; and to each of us will very speedily come an end of his labours in the world. We can best fortify ourselves by recognizing and submitting to the inevitable and by anchoring our minds on the firmest holding ground. Science will tell us that by working with the great forces that move the world, we may contribute some fragment to an edifice which will not be broken down; that to think for others instead of limiting our hopes to our petty interests is the best remedy for unavailing regret. We can take our part in the long warfare of man against the world, which is nothing else but the gradual accommodation of the race to the conditions of its dwelling-place. By so disciplining our thoughts that we may fight eagerly and hopefully, we have the best security for happiness, and not in encouraging an idle dwelling upon visions which can never be verified and which are apt to become most ghastly when we most wish for consolation.

To the question, then, from which I started, it seems that an unequivocal reply can be given. Why help to destroy the old faith from which people derive, or

believe themselves to derive, so much spiritual solace? The answer is, that the loss is overbalanced by the gain. We lose nothing that ought to be really comforting in the ancient creeds; we are relieved from much that is burdensome to the imagination and to the intellect. Those creeds were indeed in great part the work of the best and ablest of our forefathers; they therefore provide some expression for the highest emotions of which our nature is capable; but, to say nothing of the lower elements which have intruded, of the concessions made to bad passions, and to the wants of a ruder form of society, they are at best the approximations to the truth of men who entertained a radically erroneous conception of the universe. Astronomers who went on the Ptolemaic theory managed to provide a very fair description of the actual phenomena of the heavens; but the solid result of their labours was not lost when the Copernican system took its place; and incalculable advantages followed from casting aside the old cumbrous machinery of cycles and epicycles in favour of the simpler conceptions of the new doctrine. A similar change follows when man is placed at the centre of the religious and moral system. We still retain the faiths at which theologians arrived by a complex machinery of arbitrary contrivances destined to compensate one set of dogmas by another. The justice of God the Father is tempered by the mercy of God the Son, as the planet wheeled too far forwards by the cycle is brought back to its place by the epi-

cycle. When we strike out the elaborate arrangements, the truths which they aim at expressing are capable of far simpler statements; infinite error and distortion disappear, and the road is open for conceptions impossible under the old circuitous and erroneous methods.

We have arrived at the point from which we can detect the source of ancient errors, and extract the gold from the dross. One thing, indeed, remains for the present impossible. The old creed, elaborated by many generations, and consecrated to our imaginations by a vast wealth of associations, is adapted in a thousand ways to the wants of its believers. The new creed—whatever may be its ultimate form—has not been thus formulated and hallowed to our minds. We, whose fetters are just broken, cannot tell what the world will look like to men brought up in the full blaze of day, and accustomed from infancy to the free use of their limbs. For centuries all ennobling passions have been industriously associated with the hope of personal immortality, and base passions with its rejection. We cannot fully realise the state of men brought up to look for a reward of heroic sacrifice in the consciousness of good work achieved in this world instead of in the hope of posthumous repayment. Nor again, have we, if we shall ever have, any system capable of replacing the old forms of worship by which the imagination was stimulated and disciplined. That such reflections should make many men pause before

they reveal the open secret is intelligible enough. But what is the true moral to be derived from them? Surely that we should take courage and speak the truth. We should take courage, for even now the new faith offers to us a more cheering and elevating prospect than the old. When it shall have become familiar to men's minds, have worked itself into the substance of our convictions, and provided new channels for the utterance of our emotions, we may anticipate incomparably higher results. We are only laying the foundations of the temple, and know not what will be the glories of the completed edifice. Yet already the prospect is beginning to clear. The sophistries which entangle us are transparent. That faith is not the noblest which enables us to believe the greatest number of articles on the least evidence; nor is that doctrine really the most productive of happiness which encourages us to cherish the greatest number of groundless hopes. The system which is really most calculated to make men happy is that which forces them to live in a bracing atmosphere; which fits them to look facts in the face and to suppress vain repinings by strenuous action instead of luxurious dreaming.

And hence, too, the time is come for speaking plainly. If you would wait to speak the truth until you can replace the old decaying formula by a completely elaborated system, you must wait for ever; for the system can never be elaborated until its leading

principles have been boldly enunciated. Reconstruct, it is said, before you destroy. But you must destroy in order to reconstruct. The old husk of dead faith is pushed off by the growth of living beliefs below. But how can they grow unless they find distinct utterance? and how can they be distinctly uttered without condemning the doctrines which they are to replace? The truth cannot be asserted without denouncing the falsehood. Pleasant as the process might be of announcing the truth and leaving the falsehood to decay of itself, it cannot be carried into practice. Men's minds must be called back from the present of phantoms and encouraged to follow the only path which tends to enduring results. We cannot afford to make the tacit concession that our opinions, though true, are depressing and debasing. No; they are encouraging and elevating. If the medicine is bitter to the taste, it is good for the digestion. Here and there, a bold avowal of the truth will disperse a pleasing dream, as here and there it will relieve us of an oppressing nightmare. But it is not by striking balances between these pains and pleasures that the total effect of the creed is to be measured; but by the permanent influence on the mind of seeing things in their true light and dispersing the old halo of erroneous imagination. To inculcate reticence at the present moment is simply to advise us to give one more chance to the development of some new form of superstition. If the faith of the future is to be a faith which

can satisfy the most cultivated as well as the feeblest intellects, it must be founded on an unflinching respect for realities. If its partisans are to win a definitive victory, they must cease to show quarter to lies. The problem is stated plainly enough to leave no room for hesitation. We can distinguish the truth from falsehood, and see where confusion has been reproduced, and truth pressed into the service of falsehood. Nothing more is wanted but to go forward boldly, and reject once for all the weary compromises and elaborate adaptations which have become a mere vexation to all honest men. The goal is clearly in sight, though it may be distant; and we decline any longer to travel in disguise by circuitous paths, or to apologise for being in the right. Let us think freely and speak plainly, and we shall have the highest satisfaction that man can enjoy—the consciousness that we have done what little lies in ourselves to do for the maintenance of the truths on which the moral improvement and the happiness of our race depend.

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